



## Equality in Isolated Labour Markets

*Equal opportunities for men and women in geographically isolated labour markets in Læsø (DK), Suðuroy (FO), and Narsaq (GL)*

Pristed Nielsen, Helene; Hayfield, Erika Anne ; Arnfjord, Steven

DOI (link to publication from Publisher):  
[10.6027/temanord2020-522](https://doi.org/10.6027/temanord2020-522)

Creative Commons License  
CC BY 4.0

Publication date:  
2020

Document Version  
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

[Link to publication from Aalborg University](#)

Citation for published version (APA):  
Pristed Nielsen, H., Hayfield, E. A., & Arnfjord, S. (2020). *Equality in Isolated Labour Markets: Equal opportunities for men and women in geographically isolated labour markets in Læsø (DK), Suðuroy (FO), and Narsaq (GL)*. (522 ed.) Nordic Council of Ministers. TemaNord Vol. 2020 No. 522  
<https://doi.org/10.6027/temanord2020-522>

### General rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the public portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the public portal -

### Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us at [vbn@aub.aau.dk](mailto:vbn@aub.aau.dk) providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.



Nordic Council  
of Ministers

# Equality in Isolated Labour Markets

Equal opportunities for men and women in geographically isolated labour markets in Læsø (DK), Suðuroy (FO), and Narsaq (GL)

# Contents

Acknowledgements	3
Summary	4
Sammenfatning	6
1. Introduction	8
1.1 The report at a glance	9
2. Theoretical background	10
2.1 Securing an income in a geographically isolated and rural labour market	10
2.2 Gender and work in isolated labour markets	14
3. Case selection	20
3.1 Location description: Læsø, Denmark	20
3.2 Location description: Suðuroy, Faroe Islands	25
3.3 Location description: Narsaq; Greenland	30
3.4 Location descriptions: Summary	37
4. Methods and dataset	38
4.1 Læsø, Denmark	38
4.2 Suðuroy, Faroe Islands	39
4.3 Narsaq, Greenland	40
4.4 Joint workshop: Læsø, Suðuroy and Narsaq	41
5. Themes and trends in the three locations	42
5.1 Themes and trends on Læsø	42
5.2 Themes and trends on Suðuroy	56
5.3 Themes and trends in Narsaq	74
6. Differences and similarities across three study locations	85
6.1 Flexible work lives	85
6.2 Family life and gender roles	89
6.3 Belonging	90
6.4 Attitudes to change and innovation	91
6.5 Commuting and mobility	93
6.6 Generational similarities and differences	94
7. Conclusion	97
References	102
About this publication	110

# Acknowledgements

Throughout this project, we met a great deal of interesting people who are proud of the places they live and have willingly shared their experiences with us. Therefore, conducting research in Narsaq, Suðuroy and Læsø has been academically and personally enriching. This has not least been possible with the tremendous effort of our research assistants Stine Als Brix, Súsanna Holm, and Karen-Marie Ravn Poulsen, who have played an invaluable role throughout the project. They have assisted with planning, coordinating, interviewing, transcription, and analysis. For that, we are most thankful. We would also like to extend our deepest thanks to the many people in Narsaq, Suðuroy and Læsø, who have kindly spent time on the project, and provided us with insight into their lives and the places they live. This we do not take for granted, rather we consider it a privilege for researchers to enter the lives of others, if only for a short while. Last, but not least, we extend our sincere thank you to the Nordic Council of Ministers, which has funded this project through the Nordic Gender Equality Fund and made it possible to conduct this research.

**Helene Pristed Nielsen, Aalborg University, Denmark**

**Erika Anne Hayfield, University of the Faroe Islands**

**Steven Arnfjord, Ilisimatusarfik - University of Greenland**

# Summary

This report details the findings of the EQUIL project: Equality in Isolated Labour Markets. The project focuses on people living and working in geographically relatively isolated areas of the Nordic region, and asks how they are able to make a living and maintain ties to locality, and how questions of gender equality impact on work and family life decisions. The report addresses the questions: *How is gender equality and equal participation in paid work and care for the family negotiated in communities characterised by relative geographic isolation? How do people develop working life strategies in such places? What is the basis for future work life and family life in the selected places?*

Evidence was collected in three different places, respectively Narsaq in Greenland, Suðuroy in the Faroe Islands and Læsø in Denmark. While different in several important respects, these areas face a common challenge in maintaining demographic sustainability, insofar as they are generally characterised by declining population figures, and especially young women have tended to leave these areas. Therefore, the report focuses on how gender equality can be a factor in balancing working life and family life in such areas. Furthermore, the report focuses on youth attitudes to local development, as future decisions about where to live and work for this group is highly influential on long-term demographic sustainability.

The analyses in the report are based on two different theoretical sources of inspiration for the project, namely literature on income generation in geographically isolated and rural labour markets, as well as literature on gender and work in isolated labour markets. The latter literature also contains a specific focus on Nordic rural contexts. Following a presentation of our theoretical standpoint, each of our three locations are described in turn in chapter 3, with a focus on demographic developments, mobility, welfare service provisions and local labour market characteristics. These descriptions are essential for understanding some of the differences and similarities we identify across the three locations. Chapter 4 contains a description of our data sets and data collection procedures, which for practical reasons differed somewhat between the three areas, as fieldwork especially in Narsaq is a time consuming and costly affair.

Chapter 5 contains an analysis of the data from each individual location, subdivided into main themes in focus vis-à-vis our research questions. In this way, chapter 5 covers the following themes: 1) flexible work lives, 2) family life and gender roles, 3) belonging, 4) attitudes to change and innovation, 5) commuting and mobility. Chapter 6 discusses transversal themes and trends across the three locations and compares findings between the three places. Some of the main findings here are that seasonal variation in workloads is most pronounced on Læsø (which also has the most developed tourism sector), family ties are important for settlement patterns especially in Suðuroy, whereas respondents in all three locations express a strong sense of belonging in place. Respondents in Narsaq are rather suspicious of externally driven development projects, but frequently highly supportive of local initiatives, the latter also characterising attitudes encountered on Læsø. Mobility is for obvious reasons most difficult in the Greenlandic context, but nevertheless, mobility is highly significant for both work lives and family life practices in all three

locations.

In addition to these comparative conclusions, chapter 6 also contains a subsection specifically focusing on youth and the views they expressed regarding their future ambitions about where to live and work. A main finding here is that especially young women perceive local gender roles as more constrained or pre-defined than both the young men and the older generations - with the possible exception of the older Greenlandic women, who frequently concurred that local gender roles were too traditional. Almost universally, the young women saw very few career possibilities for themselves in their local communities.

Chapter 7 concludes the report, pointing to six lessons derived from the analysis, namely:

1. **Interactions of gender and place:** small places may fruitfully consider how gender and place interact locally, potentially limiting (perceived) options in the labour market
2. **Community networks:** ensuring open and multiple local networks are paramount in supporting settlement/population retention
3. **Supporting entrepreneurial spirit:** entrepreneurship benefits from overt support
4. **Prioritising 'the good life':** perceptions about 'the good life' often take presidency over perceived career possibilities when choosing where to settle
5. **Mobility strategies:** mobility is part and parcel of place, especially small places
6. **Butterfly effects:** because small places are small, even minor changes have a tendency to develop amplified effects

These lessons may have implication both at policy level but also locally for residents in debating how best to ensure viable demographic and economic future development in their locality.

# Sammenfatning

Nærværende rapport præsenterer resultaterne af EQUIL-projektet: Ligestilling på isolerede arbejdsmarkeder (efter det engelske Equality in Isolated Labour Markets). Projektet fokuserer på mennesker, der bor og arbejder i geografisk relativt isolerede områder i Norden, og spørger, hvordan de er i stand til at skabe en indtægt, opretholde bånd til stedet, og hvordan spørgsmål om ligestilling påvirker beslutninger om arbejde og familieliv. Rapporten behandler spørgsmålene: Hvordan forhandles ligestilling mellem kønnene og lige deltagelse i lønarbejde og omsorg for familien i samfund, der er præget af relativ geografisk isolering? Hvordan udvikler folk arbejdslivsstrategier sådanne steder? Hvad er grundlaget for det fremtidige arbejdsliv og familieliv på de udvalgte steder?

Der blev indsamlet data tre forskellige steder, henholdsvis Narsaq i Grønland, Suðuroy på Færøerne og Læsø i Danmark. Selvom disse områder adskiller sig i flere vigtige henseender, står de alle over for en fælles udfordring med at opretholde den demografiske bæredygtighed, for så vidt de generelt er kendetegnet ved faldende befolkningstal, og især unge kvinder har haft en tendens til at forlade disse områder. Derfor fokuserer rapporten på, hvordan ligestilling mellem kønnene kan være en faktor i balancen mellem arbejdsliv og familieliv i disse områder. Rapporten fokuserer endvidere på ungdommens holdninger til lokal udvikling, da fremtidige beslutninger om, hvor man skal bo og arbejde for denne gruppe, har stor indflydelse på den langsigtede demografiske bæredygtighed i den enkelte lokalitet.

Analyserne i rapporten er baseret på to forskellige teoretiske inspirationskilder til projektet, nemlig litteratur om skabelse af indkomst eller livsgrundlag i geografisk isolerede og landlige arbejdsmarkeder samt litteratur om køn og arbejde i isolerede arbejdsmarkeder. Sidstnævnte litteratur indeholder også et specifikt fokus på nordiske landområder. Efter en præsentation af vores teoretiske synspunkt er hver af vores tre lokationer beskrevet i kapitel 3 med fokus på den demografiske udvikling, mobilitet, lokalt udbud af velfærdsservices og karakteristika ved det enkelte arbejdsmarked. Disse beskrivelser er vigtige for at forstå nogle af de forskelle og ligheder, vi identificerer på tværs af de tre steder. Kapitel 4 indeholder en beskrivelse af vores datasæt og procedurer for dataindsamling, der af praktiske grunde adskiller sig noget mellem de tre områder, da feltarbejde især i Narsaq er en tidskrævende og dyr affære.

Kapitel 5 indeholder en analyse af dataene fra hvert enkelt sted, opdelt i hovedtemaer i forhold til vores forskningsspørgsmål. På denne måde dækker kapitel 5 følgende temaer: 1) fleksible arbejdsliv, 2) familieliv og kønsroller, 3) stedtilhørighed, 4) holdninger til forandring og innovation og 5) pendling og mobilitet. Kapitel 6 diskuterer tværgående temaer og tendenser på tværs af de tre lokaliteter og sammenligner fund mellem de tre steder. Nogle af de vigtigste fund her er, at sæsonbestemte variationer i mængden af arbejde er mest udtalt på Læsø (som også har den mest udviklede turismesektor), familieband er vigtige for bosættelsesmønstre især på Suðuroy, hvorimod informanterne på alle tre lokationer udtrykker en stærk følelse af stedtilhørighed. Informanterne i Narsaq er temmelig skeptiske over for eksternt drevne udviklingsprojekter, men bakker derimod ofte stærkt op omkring lokale initiativer, hvor sidstnævnte også kendetegner holdninger

mødt på Læsø. Mobilitet er af åbenlyse grunde vanskeligst i grønlandsk sammenhæng, men alligevel er mobilitet meget vigtig for både arbejdsliv og familieliv på alle tre lokationer.

Ud over disse komparative konklusioner indeholder kapitel 6 også et underafsnit, der specifikt fokuserer på ungdom og de synspunkter, de gav udtryk for omkring deres fremtidige ambitioner om, hvor de skal bo og arbejde. En vigtig konstatering her er, at især unge kvinder opfatter lokale kønsroller som mere begrænsede eller foruddefinerede end både de unge mænd og de ældre generationer - med den mulige undtagelse af de ældre grønlandske kvinder, der ofte var enige om, at lokale kønsroller var for traditionelle. De unge kvinder så næsten universelt meget få karrieremuligheder for sig selv i deres lokalsamfund.

Kapitel 7 afslutter rapporten og peger på seks læringspunkter, der kan udledes af analysen, nemlig:

1. **Interaktion mellem køn og sted:** små steder kan med fordel overveje, hvordan køn og sted spiller sammen på lokalt plan og evt. begrænser tilgængelige kønsroller og jobmuligheder
2. **Fællesskabets netværk:** det er vigtigt at sikre åbne og flere lokale netværk for at støtte bosætning
3. **Støtte iværksætterånd:** iværksætteri drager stor fordel af åben og udtalt støtte
4. **Prioritering af 'det gode liv':** opfattelser af muligheder for at opnå 'det gode liv' prioriteres ofte over opfattede karrieremuligheder, når man vælger, hvor man skal bosætte sig
5. **Mobilitetsstrategier:** mobilitet og mulighederne for mobilitet er definerende for steder, især små steder
6. **Sommerfugleeffekter:** fordi små steder er små, har selv små forandringer en tendens til at udvikle forstærkede effekter

Disse læringspunkter kan have betydning både på politisk niveau, men også lokalt for beboerne i debatter om, hvordan man bedst kan sikre en bæredygtig demografisk og økonomisk fremtidig udvikling i deres lokalitet.



# 1. Introduction

This report communicates the central findings from the EQUIL (Equality in Isolated Labour Markets) project, which ran from 2018-2020, and which was funded by a grant from the Nordic Gender Equality Fund (For more information on the Nordic Gender Equality Fund: <https://nikk.no/en/nordic-equality-fund/>). The project focuses on people living and working in geographically relatively isolated areas of the Nordic region, and asks how they are able to make a living and maintain ties to locality, and how questions of gender equality impact on decisions regarding work, family life and where to live. We ask the following research questions: ***How is gender equality and equal participation in paid work and care for the family negotiated in communities characterised by relative geographic isolation? How do people develop working life strategies in such places? What is the basis for future work life and family life in the selected places?***

The project aims at understanding work life and settlement choices, as well as the importance of family life and gender roles among men and women living in geographically relatively isolated areas in terms of creating a living, maintaining ties to the local community, and possibly further gender equality. According to ideals about gender equality, both men and women in Nordic countries are presumed to take part in labour market activities as well as caring for the family, but we know very little about how such ideals are perceived and negotiated in areas with restricted opportunities for commuting to neighbouring labour markets.

The places in focus are Narsaq in Greenland, Suðuroy in the Faroe Islands and Læsø in Denmark, which all three are places where it is either practically impossible (Narsaq) or associated with substantial costs in time and/or money (Suðuroy and Læsø) to commute anywhere else for work. While different in several important respects, these three places face a common challenge in maintaining demographic sustainability, insofar as they are generally characterised by dwindling population figures, and especially young women have tended to leave.

Gender is an important parameter for understanding both demographic and economic development in relatively isolated areas. Men and women in the Nordic countries occupy different positions in the labour market and in social structures. This means that they have different roles for local economies and maintenance/ contestation of social structures. Therefore, gender equality and gendered divisions within the labour market, as well as between work and care, are central foci in the analysis. Furthermore, the report focuses on youth attitudes to local development, as future decisions about where to live and work for this group is highly influential on long-term demographic sustainability.

The project contributes to an understanding of how equal opportunities are created for men and women in geographically isolated labour markets and how this, among other things, contributes to residents' sense of belonging, attitudes and hopes towards the future and opportunities for achieving a balance between family life and work life. To this end, it is also relevant to understand how the next generation perceives possibilities for living in these areas, and how they see themselves as girls becoming women and boys becoming men in terms of education, work and

settlement choices. The report also documents the importance - now and in the future – of having an entrepreneurial focus on geographically relatively isolated areas. This focus is in some locations ensured by the local communities themselves, and in others the focus needs more political support, for example by local or municipal business councils.

## 1.1 The report at a glance

The report has been written as an integrated whole, but if some readers are more interested in one of our three locations, it is also possible to read only the parts pertaining to the specific place. We start in chapter 2 with presenting our theoretical sources of inspiration for the project, more specifically current literature on income generation in geographically isolated and rural labour markets, as well as literature on gender and work in isolated labour markets. The latter literature also contains a specific focus on Nordic rural contexts.

Following the presentation of our theoretical standpoint, each of our three locations are described in turn in chapter 3, with a focus on e.g. demographic developments, mobility, welfare service provisions and local labour market characteristics. Chapter 4 contains a description of our data sets and data collection procedures, which for practical reasons differed somewhat between the three areas, as fieldwork especially in Narsaq is a time consuming and costly affair.

Chapter 5 contains an analysis of the data from each individual location, subdivided into main themes in focus vis-à-vis our research questions. Chapter 6 discusses transversal themes and trends across the three locations and compares findings between the three places. Chapter 6 also contains a subsection specifically focusing on youth and the views they expressed regarding their future ambitions about where to live and work. Chapter 7 concludes the report.

## 2. Theoretical background

The main emphasis in this report is to document and compare empirical findings across our three locations of data collection. Nevertheless, we start by briefly introducing the two main theoretical strands of thought which have influenced our research design and approach to data collection. The first of these strands revolves around modern developments in the labour market, especially focusing on increased flexibilisation of work (Beck, 1992) and evolving patterns of 'patchwork' work lives and increasing job uncertainty (Blossfeld et al., 2008). As part of this, we are also interested in literature on rural labour markets and so-called 'pluriactivity', as discussed below. The second strand of research, which has informed our thinking, takes its starting point in feminist geography, more specifically in questions surrounding the links between gender and place, and the emerging literature on gender and island places (Gaini & Pristed Nielsen, 2020; Karides, 2017).

### 2.1 Securing an income in a geographically isolated and rural labour market

A number of theories developed since the 1990s focus on changes in the labour market concerning new demands and expectations for workers' flexibility and mobility (Beck, 1992; Standing, 2009, 2011), and on how globalisation changes local conditions for job security (Blossfeld et al., 2008). Such expectations of increased flexibility and mobility seem particularly to affect the peripheral areas of the Nordic region (Faber & Pristed Nielsen, 2015), as local expectations and requirements for e.g. education levels are changing (Corbett, 2013; Hansen, 2014).

Several locally-based studies indicate that traditional skills and competences are replaced or accompanied by the need for new types of skills (Angel et al., 2012; Gerrard, 2013) and new types (and higher levels) of education (Corbett, 2013; Hansen, 2014)<sup>1</sup> and/or increased employment-related mobility (Pristed Nielsen, 2016; Walsh, 2013). According to Dahlström et al (Dahlström et al., 2006), such theories of labour market changes can be summarised in "transitional labour market theory", which, rather than focusing on lifelong wage work, focuses on networks and flexible links of wage labour and other forms of gaining experience, education and/or an income. These theories are thus based on the observation that the boundary between the labour market and other parts of society - the education system, the individual household economy etc. - is increasingly blurred (Dahlström et al., 2006, p. 13).

The report "How to Make a Living in Insular Areas - Six Nordic Cases" (Dahlström et al., 2006) specifically addresses the question of how to secure an income in geographically isolated areas. The empirical focus is on six small and relatively isolated areas in the Nordic region, but neither Greenland nor the Faroe Islands are included in the data set. Nevertheless, the research question: "How do people

---

1. This is also referred to in the literature as an 'upward skill bias' (Blossfeld et al., 2008; Burton-Jones, 2003), whereby those unable to participate in continual training are either squeezed out of the labour market, or may experience a growing wage gap in comparison to better educated peers.

generate income in insular areas, where a daily commute to a neighboring labour market is unrealistic?" (Dahlström et al., 2006, p. 9) is highly relevant also to the three places in focus in the EQUIL project. The report by Dahlström et al points to a number of general factors that must be taken into account, in order to understand the premises for creating an income in a labour market that is geographically isolated, and therefore, it provides a point of inspiration for our own analyses.

Nevertheless, there are a few conceptual discussions, which we wish to address up front, before presenting our further considerations. Our first discussion of concepts concerns the notion of 'insular' or 'isolation'. Dahlström et al define insular the following way: "The concept insular means that it is not realistic to commute on a daily basis to a neighboring labour market and therefore the areas are insulated in terms of opportunities for the population to make a living there" (Dahlström et al., 2006, p. 9). We refrain from using the word 'insular' because of the fact that commutes are possible – if cumbersome – from two of our locations, but also because the concept of insular might connote thoughts of intended seclusion and withdrawal from the general society, and following that line of thought, it is a stigmatising concept. Therefore, we speak of 'geographically isolated' or 'relatively isolated' areas.

The concept of rurality becomes relevant when describing the study's three different locations. The whole conceptualisation of 'the rural' in relation to the urban is rather clear in modern rural sociology. At the same time, there has been a shift in the sociological understanding of rural communities as places of self-sufficiency to a current situation where rural people are more connected to a national economy and dependent on a centralised and globalised political union with urban citizens (Lohmann, 2005). When looking at rurality from a welfare perspective, one thing that defines the rural—and this goes for Greenland as well—is that when communities are located too far from a political hub, and thereby the decision-making process, such communities will receive diminished political attention, and therefore also experience a reduction in specialised services available. This situation has not changed since some of the first work on rural welfare started to appear in the 1930s (Daley, 2014).

In the broader literature on rurality, 'remote' and 'rural' are often used interchangeably. However, Collier (Collier, 2006) separates the remote community and the rural community. The remote refers to places where indigenous populations live (Collier, 2006; Schmidt, 2000), whereas the rural is viewed as farmland and farming communities. In our understanding, we are trailing some of the concepts above, but adjusted with a modern understanding of rurality as places in which self-sustaining economies are found. Rural societies, furthermore, are currently better linked to the urban centres due to more flexible communicative options like broadband and 4G networks and better serviced commuting options.

While not in complete agreement with Dahlström et al's conceptual framework, the empirical premise that it is not realistic to commute on a daily basis to/from the labour markets we investigate, is one that our project shares. In this sense, our focus is on geographically isolated rural labour markets. Dahlström et al also point out that such labour markets, because of their isolation, cannot function as 'markets' in the traditional sense - with supply and demand of labour - as there are often other processes at stake than the usual economic forces that influence supply and demand. Such forces may include e.g. traditions, cultural values, seasons, etc. which

can both affect the supply of labour and the demand for it.

Therefore, an alternative (or rather a supplement) to the "transitional labour market theory" is the DORA model (Bryden & Hart, 2004; Dahlström et al., 2006, p. 15), which is specifically developed for non-urban areas. DORA stands for 'Dynamics of Rural Areas', and the main point of this theory is that a number of immaterial or intangible factors play a role in local labour markets. Local intangible factors such as 'forms of community and identity', 'quality of life', 'local traditions and history', 'values, beliefs and attitudes', and 'institutional cooperation' are thus among 20 intangible factors identified by Bryden and Hart (Bryden & Hart, 2004, pp. 21–24) as impacting economic performance of rural regions. Such factors should, therefore, be included in explanations of local economic activity and business development processes. While originally developed as a rural labour market theory, Dahlström et al argue that the theory is particularly useful in the study of what they term 'insular labour markets'. This means that with the DORA model, a number of qualitative analyses must be added to standard quantitative analyses of supply and demand, in order to understand the dynamics in local labour markets. This is in line with our approach below, where our analyses focus on qualitative understandings of individual and household decisions about work life and family life balances (coupled with decisions about where to live and work).

Another deviation from standard quantitative (economic) approaches to investigating labour markets lies in the notion of 'securing an income'. As Dahlström et al point out, "In insular labour markets, multiple job holding is particularly common, and includes transitions both within the labour market and between the labour market and other support systems such as unemployment benefit" (Dahlström et al., 2006, p. 13). For the same reason, Dahlström et al point out that it is more appropriate to talk about 'income systems' in such contexts, rather than just 'income'. One of the factors affecting such income systems is seasonal changes. "Over a year, and working life, individuals who live in these areas are likely to move between the labour market, i.e. having a job or being self-employed, and other parts of the income system" (Dahlström et al., 2006, p. 9).

Furthermore, according to Dahlström et al (Dahlström et al., 2006, p. 9), the 'black' or 'informal' economy, that is, the part of the income not disclosed to the tax authorities, plays a potentially important role in geographically isolated labour markets. Another source of income, which is often not included in traditional analyses, is transfer income. Some literature argues that this can greatly help strengthen the local monetary economy and thereby indirectly support the individual geographically isolated labour market. Rasmussen, Roto and Hamilton emphasise how retired people in Greenlandic hamlets still contribute to the economy; "although the older population is more dependent in national terms, they may contribute to local economies in several ways. For example, pensions provide cash income to elderly people and their families. They may also contribute to subsistence activities" (Rasmussen et al., 2015, pp. 167–168). Revenue from for example pensions will thus typically be converted to consumption within the local economy, thereby contributing to demand for local labour, in this way adding to the local economy both directly and indirectly. Meert's (2000) analyses of relatively deprived areas in Belgium also address the role of 'alternative' sources of income. He includes "redistribution" (e.g. in the form of charity and welfare) and "reciprocity" (in the form of mutual favours and sharing) together with "remunerated activities" in understanding the income base of households in rural communities (Meert, 2000, p. 320).

However, we wish to emphasise that traditional full-time wage work certainly does exist within the places we focus on in the report. In fact, numerically speaking, such type of work may dominate. Nevertheless, in terms of relative importance, much evidence indicates that alternatives to regular full-time wage labour is important for understanding opportunities within geographically isolated rural labour markets.

Another relevant theoretical contribution to expanding our notion of 'income' comes from the concept of 'pluriactivity'. According to de Vries, the concept refers to "the phenomenon of farm households combining farming with other gainful activities" (Vries, 1993, p. 191) and it includes on-farm agricultural and non-agricultural, as well as off-farm activities. Based on studies in respectively the Netherlands and Norway, de Vries (de Vries, 1993) and Jervell (1999) both engage in discussions about how to conceptualise pluriactivity. Both agree on farming as being at the centre of attention. Both also point to the importance of considering the unit of analysis, so that it is not only the farmer whose activities are analysed, but the household as "a unit of consumption and income-pooling activities" (Vries, 1993, p. 191).

Robertson, Perkins and Taylor (2008) are somewhat critical of the central premise, exemplified in de Vries and Jervell's work, that farming is a necessary component of 'pluriactivity'. They argue for expanding the notion to "explicitly incorporate rural people who may have several lines of non-farm business living and working alongside those farmers who have responded to rural change by engaging in pluriactivity" (Robertson et al., 2008, p. 333). Other researchers have employed 'pluriactivity' also in cases where farming was not part of activities engaged in, e.g. Salmi (Salmi, 2005, 2015), who researches fishing livelihoods, but employs 'pluriactivity' generally to refer to "diversification of life bases" (Salmi, 2005, p. 22). Eikeland (1999) also takes a broad approach, defining 'pluriactivity' as "gaining an income from more than one economic activity".

At the community level, Nilsen (2014) highlights processes of expanding local income bases in his study of the modernisation of Norwegian coastal areas during the period 1900-1950. His analyses are specifically aimed at explaining how Norwegian modernisation has taken place while retaining a relatively high population number scattered along the coastline (Nilsen, 2014, p. 50). Nilsen argues that a key to explaining this pattern is that modern professions (e.g. in mining or manufacturing) often became elements of flexible work strategies in Norwegian rural areas, making it possible for many locals to remain resident in the local community (Nilsen, 2014, p. 53). He also refers to Drivenes (1985) for the point that "the farmer-fisher did not end up as a miner, but in periods he was *also* a miner". In other words, the processes described by Nilsen are a form of modernisation of rural areas without professional specialisation. This pattern, with pluriactivity and simultaneous combinations of different sources of income, apparently creates the basis for sustained settlement in smaller local areas (Nilsen, 2014). This contrasts with a study of labour market strategies among workers in Danish coastal areas, where Pristed Nielsen (2016, 2018) identifies a pattern of 'bungy jumping', whereby local workers are strongly rooted in their communities, but often move away over long distances to undertake temporary work in other geographic contexts. This in many cases ensures them an income earned outside the local area, which is brought back to the local economy in connection with returning to their starting point.

Pristed Nielsen, therefore, introduces a distinction between two alternative models of working life strategies in peripheral areas, each of which shed light on how

individuals can negotiate their place attachment, intergenerational relationships, and the need to have access to income and education, also in places where few opportunities for regular full-time employment exist. The relationship between place of living and income can thus be conceptualised as following two different patterns. The first pattern can be characterized as "resident, simultaneous, non-specialized pluriactivity", while the alternative pattern is characterised by "mobile, serial, specialized and consecutive jobs". These two patterns denote contrasting ways of ensuring an income relative to one's geographic location (Pristed Nielsen, 2018).

The first pattern (resident, simultaneous, non-specialised pluriactivity) is characterised by a working life based on permanent residence in the same local area, often with a high degree of flexibility in working time for the individual job/individual source of income, which can be seasonally dependent. In contrast, the second pattern (mobile, serial, specialised, and consecutive jobs) refers to a geographically mobile work life, which may or may not involve returning to one's place of origin. This work pattern is thus based on serial activation of highly specialised skills in different geographic locations (Pristed Nielsen, 2018).

The identification of these patterns is very interesting, not least in relation to the future demographic and economic sustainability of geographically isolated rural labour markets. If we integrate the two models with points discussed above, we obtain a complex understanding of what it may mean to secure an income and maintain a living in a geographically isolated rural labour market. This complex understanding fits well with findings from empirical studies by Hansen and Tejsner (2016) regarding local citizens' reactions to prospects of developing oil wells in Baffin Bay in northwest Greenland. Although the development of an oil industry in the local area could potentially create regular full-time employment for local residents, this is not necessarily seen as attractive to local young men.

The young men expressed an interest in potentially supplementing their hunting activities with jobs in the oil industry. But it was clear that they first and foremost consider themselves hunters and only want to take other jobs if it is possible to use the opportunity to support the life they already live (Hansen & Tejsner, 2016, p. 91).

Permanent full-time work thus potentially leaves too little flexibility according to local practices, traditions and maybe also gender relations. Likewise, Hansen and Tejsner point out that being 'unemployed' in a Greenlandic context is not the same as not working, because you may be hunting for food for the family when there is no formal paid work outside the fishing season. Work is therefore not necessarily a matter of either-or, but often of both-and, which our analyses below also document.

## 2.2 Gender and work in isolated labour markets

The three cases of Narsaq, Suðuroy and Læsø, are all small localised labour markets within the Nordic countries. The Nordic area is generally recognised as a region of relatively high gender and social equality, which has been promoted through a model of universalism in state welfare (Faber et al., 2016). Notwithstanding the Nordic emphasis on producing gender equal societies; trajectories of history, place, and practice shape how gender is enacted locally (Massey, 1994; McDowell, 1999). Therefore, we argue that taking a context-based approach is integral to understanding how globalisation and locality, materially and discursively, confluence

to construct local gender arrangements. In this sense, gender relations are contingent upon and evolve from practices in space and place. This section on gender and work is commenced by addressing welfare policies, which frame the spectrum of work opportunities for families with care responsibilities. This is followed by a discussion on the impact of local economies on gender. Lastly, gender practices are addressed in the context of mobilities and migration practices.

### **2.2.1 Labour market participation and the Nordic model**

As a structural feature of Nordic societies, the key principle of gender equality underpinning the Nordic welfare model is manifested in so-called women-friendly policies (Borchorst & Siim, 2008). Such policies are aimed at giving women an equal basis to participate on the labour market (Gíslason, 2011). Through discourses of a dual earner/dual carer labour market model, women and men are expected to share paid and unpaid work (Eydal & Rostgaard, 2011), which has led to parenting becoming highly politicised in the Nordic countries (Ellingsæter & Leira, 2006).

States within the Nordic regime have actively implemented care and work-family policy initiatives to promote women's labour market participation, and fathers as carers. The widespread offering of affordable public day-care for children (Eydal et al., 2015), generous parental leave systems with ear-marked paternal quotas, and public care for the elderly (Borchorst & Siim, 2008), are key characteristics of such welfare regimes. Furthermore, the public sectors of Nordic countries are large employers of women, often in welfare professions such as nursing, pedagogy, teaching, and social work. In some isolated areas, the public sector, both as municipality and national government, play an important role in creating valuable jobs locally, and thus helping sustain livelihoods in such places. For instance, research in South Greenland has highlighted that women holding public sector jobs have become main breadwinners in many households. As economic restructuring and climate change significantly impact income from men's hunting activities, women find themselves being the main source of income (van Voorst, 2009).

The social democratic Nordic model has resulted in women's labour market participation in the Nordic countries being amongst the highest in Europe (Eurostat, 2020) with the Faroe Islands ranking the highest (Hayfield et al., 2016). Despite variations, the labour markets of the region are highly gender segregated in terms of occupations, industries, sectors (Ellingsæter, 2013), and worked hours per week (Drange et al., 2014).

Despite the Nordic model as a promoter of the dual earner/dual carer labour market model, gender and belonging are products of place and space (Forsberg, 2001). Gendered practices, therefore, are shaped through past and present local economic restraints and possibilities (McDowell, 1999). In geographically isolated, difficult to get to (and from) places, occupations are often gender segregated and women are expected to be primary carers and hold employment in proximity to children (Hayfield, 2018), especially if men practice long-distance work. However, as Bock (2004, p. 22) argues, the gendered nature of rurality does not in itself explain gender roles. Rather, places must be understood as being in constant interaction with structures, culture, and individual factors (Bock, 2004).

In geographically isolated areas of the Nordics, there is evidence that gender



relations are undergoing changes between generations and over time, assisted by work-family policies and structural changes (Brandth, 2016, p. 437; Gerrard, 2017). As women these days are active on the labour market and many well-educated, rural men increasingly incorporate practices of caring for children into their sense of masculinity (Brandth, 2016, p. 437). As a consequence of such changes to work patterns and labour market composition, gender relations in geographically isolated areas are being renegotiated.

### 2.2.2 Local economies, nature, and gender

The local economies of many geographically isolated communities in the Nordics are traditionally based on fishing, farming, hunting or other natural resource-based industries. Materialities of landscape, be it mountains, ice, plateaus; or of water, in the form of sea, fjords or lakes, are not merely neutral natural spaces (O'Reilly et al., 2009, p. 382). Rather they are masculinised domains to be dominated, controlled, and mastered by men (Little, 2002, p. 666), often by means of large equipment, such as boats and farming technology (Little & Panelli, 2003, p. 285).

Economies of isolated areas have transformed during late modernity. There are fewer jobs in primary industries and many hold employment in secondary or tertiary sectors. Consequently, interaction with outdoor spaces associated with nature-based economies may be decreasing. As a result, men in some remote places transform traditions of necessity into traditions of masculinity practices. For instance, in the Faroe Islands, sheep rearing as food source and leisure pursuit, previously vital for subsistence, is a valued practice in non-urban areas. The domain of sheep rearing is highly masculine, and women's assistance is generally limited to specific tasks, such as sheep shearing or cleaning the paunch. If women carry out tasks, traditionally in the masculine domain, Joensen (Joensen, 1999) argues, this is not conducted with the same commitment as men (p.101).

In another example from Norway, Bye (2003) demonstrates how moose hunting in Norway constitutes masculine rural identities, which are contrasted to the urban. In moose hunting practices, women are welcome to take part and, as such, men "...unlock an area which for generations has been considered exclusively male". However, "...they [men] are also careful to keep their gendered spaces. Women are welcome to participate, but they must do so within the terms and conditions set by the men" (p.151). From a Greenlandic perspective, only a few hundred individuals make a livelihood from hunting today. Yet, as Gaini (Gaini, 2017, p. 60) draws attention to; traditional fishing families construct a hegemonic masculinity as that of the hunting hero. For most young men, this is an unrealistic ideal, which is in stark contrast to employment opportunities in Greenland today.

There has been criticism of discourses of the rural and remote as being stable and fixed (Milbourne & Kitchen, 2014, p. 327) and upholding traditional gender relations. Brandth (2016, p. 437) conceptualises rural masculinities as undergoing change, as ideals of manhood transform between generations, and at the same time ideals are intimately connected to different situations and contexts. In this vein, she argues that rural masculinities are "hierarchical, variable, multiple and situational" (Brandth, 2016, p. 437). As such, the notion of gender is more complex and has expanded in accordance with women's labour market participation and changing local economies.

### 2.2.3 Gendered mobilities and rural places

Mobilities are central to understanding distance and geographically isolated areas (Bærenholdt & Granås, 2016). Consequently, the intensity of movement to and from such places is a central feature of life, whether it be for work, education, health or social purposes. Isolated places rely on constant interaction with the world, be it in the form of human travel, transport of goods or communication. As local labour markets have limited employment opportunities, commuting to larger, centralised regions for work is common practice. However, such commuting may take different forms. Commuting can involve frequent travel, e.g. several times every week, having second accommodation elsewhere and travelling home at weekends, or working-long distance. Working long-distance typically involves being away from home for weeks or months at a time and is prevalent in the natural resource-based industries such as fishing- and off-shore industries (Aure, 2018; Hovgaard, 2015; Pristed Nielsen, 2016; Walsh, 2012).

Mobilities, whether travelling near or far, are practices or habits, in which gender is constituted (Bye, 2003). In many geographically isolated areas, the primacy of men's paid employment over that of women's entails that work-related absence of men for lengthy periods is legitimised, while women's proximity to home and unpaid care work is expected and reinforced through cultural norms (Aure, 2018). In natural resource-based industries such as fishing, it is accepted that men's mobility is connected to that of the fish, as men must respond to fishing opportunities as and when they arise (Gerrard, 2013). Notwithstanding gendered work hierarchies, men pursue active caregiving, practicing intensive fathering during periods at home, and women use flexibility to pursue careers and have meaningful employment (Aure, 2018; Hayfield et al., 2016).

Despite the gendered nature of (im)mobilities, Hanson (Hanson, 2010) problematises the assumption that mobilities necessarily are empowering. She points out that mobility as empowering is generally considered from the perspective of being able to move to take advantage of (employment) opportunities. However, motivations for commuting, be it frequent or long-distance, may be due to a lack of choice and limited job opportunities. Therefore, for some, practicing mobility is grounded in labour market structures, and an inevitable consequence of living in isolated places (Farrugia, 2016). On the reverse, being rooted in place can be empowering, as it can foster social relations and well-developed support networks (Hanson, 2010), which are conducive to place belongingness (Antonsich, 2010). The complex relationship between gender and mobility, therefore, involves looking beyond differences in mobility practices. Rather insight into how gender and power are embedded in mobility/immobility in various contexts are crucial to understand the changing and evolving criteria of masculinities and femininities (Gerrard, 2013, p. 318; Hanson, 2010, p. 11).

#### 2.2.4 Migration and demography

Geographically isolated places are often associated with the out-migration of young people, which has been termed the mobility imperative of rural youth (Farrugia, 2016). Struggling with depopulation, many such places become even more disadvantaged as out-migration is frequently gendered in nature (Dahlström, 1996; Kociszky et al., 2012; Rauhut & Little, 2016; Walsh, 2013). This can result in a skewed sex ratio, with an overrepresentation of men (Bloksgaard et al., 2015; Hamilton & Otterstad, 1998) in some such areas.

Research on out-migration from geographically isolated places points to various facets of young people's decision to move away. Although not all isolated places are small, they are frequently non-urban and the level of familiarity amongst people is high. For some youth, one facet of moving away is to escape the sense of claustrophobia that can be experienced in small places (Bjarnason & Thorlindsson, 2006). At the same time, youth can experience comfort and safety in the social intimacy of such places, but nonetheless seek urbanised areas, characterised by anonymity (Jones, 1999; Pedersen & Gram, 2018). This dialectical relationship to place, however, does not appear to conflict with decisions to out-migrate. In a study of youth living in rural Sweden, Rönnlund (Rönnlund, 2020) found that the relationship between localised identification and future intentions of leaving or staying was not straightforward. Therefore, being rooted and belonging in place, does not necessarily say much about whether young people will leave. Rather feelings of home are part of living translocal lives.

Out-migration, however, is not a simple stay or leave decision. Rather it is complex and often fostered through a culture of migration (Corbett, 2007; Hayfield, 2017), generally associated with educational or work trajectories (Pristed Nielsen, 2018; Walsh, 2013) and a lack of localised opportunities (Paulgaard, 2012). In some isolated areas, young women have been found to have higher educational ambitions, compared to young men (Bloksgaard et al., 2015; Michael Corbett, 2007; Dahlström, 1996), resulting in women leaving at a higher rate. Furthermore, many such places are characterised by male-dominated industries. This means that, on the one hand they are perceived as having fewer opportunities for women (Hamilton & Otterstad, 1998), and the other as being traditional masculinised spaces (Forsberg, 1998; Walsh, 2013).

Amidst concerns over youth out-migration and aging populations, more recently though, demographic changes appear to be apparent in several isolated areas of the Nordics. Increasingly, immigrants from non-Nordic countries now make up populations in geographically isolated areas (Grønseth, 2011; Aure & Munkejord, 2016; Júlíusdóttir et al., 2013). Migration to and from such places is not a new phenomenon; however, the presence of ethnic minority groups is now gaining increased attention (de Lima, 2012). Although a consequence of globalisation, the reasons for these changes in demography are complex as the routes, which initially lead immigrants to settle in geographically isolated areas vary, some migrate for work purposes, some to settle with a partner/spouse, or for entirely different reasons.

In one study of migrants to rural Norway, gender relations were presented as equal in terms of share of domestic and childcare duties (Munkejord, 2006). Furthermore, in over one third of Munkejord's (2006) informant couples, the woman's career

prospects were the reason for moving (p.247). In a later study of male migrants, Aure and Munkejord (2016) found what they term "the prevalence of novel non hegemonic masculinities among in-migrants" (p.531). Yet, for female migrants, most notably of Eastern European or non-European origin, who migrate to marry, gender relations become reconstituted in space and place. Wara and Munkejord (2018) found that in contexts associated with nature and the elements, migrant women position men in a dominant hierarchical position, as he who is more skilful and powerful (p.9). From a slightly different perspective, in the Faroe Islands, Ísfeld (2019) concluded that many of her informants are drawn to the ideal of the Western man, with whom they believe they can practice a more equal partnership, compared to possibilities in their countries of origin.

As an overall conclusion, we cannot subscribe to a dichotomy of gender discourses of the geographically isolated traditional, versus the progressive equal urban. Gender contracts are continuously being challenged, reworked, and renegotiated (Grimsrud, 2011). Therefore, in geographically isolated communities, there are varieties of femininities and masculinities in coexistence. Furthermore, these are practiced differently, depending on settings and contexts. To understand how gender is practiced in remote labour markets, demands our attention to history, local economies and mobilities and how these are shaped in gendered spaces.

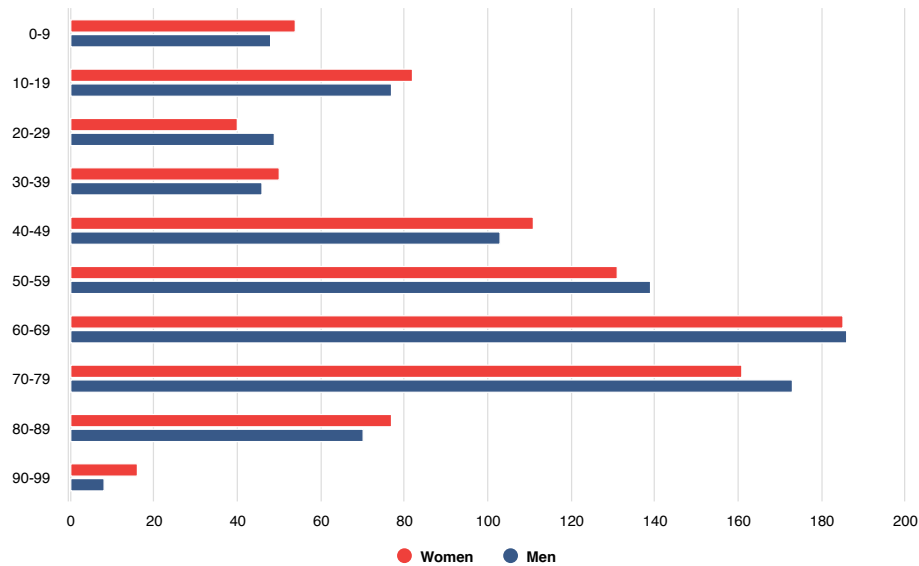
## 3. Case selection

This chapter provides a brief introduction to the three locations of this research project, as we present some demographic, geographic and historical points of relevance. In this way, we follow through on the argument above that understanding how gender is practiced in isolated labour markets demands attention to history, local economies and mobilities. Although the locations are highly diverse, they also share some significant similarities – these differences and similarities are important for forming a contextual understanding before proceeding to discuss the empirical findings below.

### 3.1 Location description: Læsø, Denmark

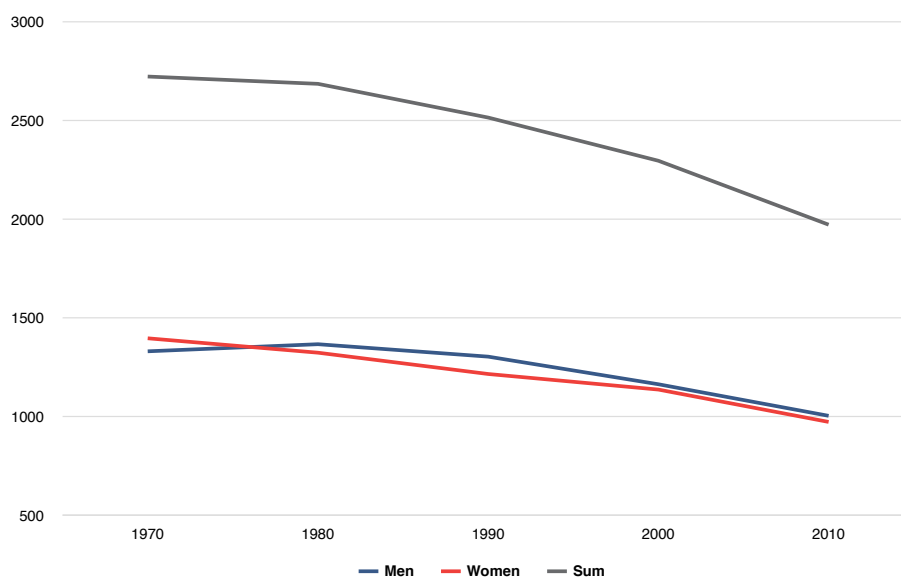
#### 3.1.1 Location, demographics and mobility

Læsø is located in the Kattegat Sea between Denmark and Sweden, off the coast of North Jutland. The area of Læsø is 118 km<sup>2</sup>, with 1,806 inhabitants as of January 1<sup>st</sup> 2019 (Læsø Kommune, 2018). The depopulation of Læsø has been a recurrent topic of discussion for several years, not only because of the declining population, but also because of the island's 'female deficit'. In 2017, 20% of the population was between 0-29 years old, 34% was between 30-59 years old, and 46% was above 60 years old (Region Nordjylland 2020a; Statistics Denmark). The population in 2019 was 907 women and 899 men, but even if this number is more or less even, it glosses over differences within age cohorts. The most significant difference between the population of men and women is in the age between 20-29 years old, where there in 2019 were 49 men, but only 40 women. The difference within this age cohort is especially significant for future demographic projections in the island. The following graph provides an overview of the gender and age distribution on the island at the time of data collection:



**Figure 1: Population of Læsø 2019** (Statistics Denmark [Statistikbanken.dk](https://statistikbanken.dk))

As mentioned, the population on Læsø has been declining for a considerable period of time. The table below shows population figures going back to 1970. During the 1970s, there were more women than men on the island, but this changed in the 1980s.



**Figure 2: Population of Læsø 1970-2000** (Statistics Denmark [Statistikbanken.dk](https://statistikbanken.dk))

Because Læsø is an island, the opportunity to commute to the mainland is mainly by ferry. The ferry has its route between Frederikshavn in North Jutland and to Vesterø havn, which is located on the north east side of Læsø. It is also possible to fly to

Læsø from Roskilde on Zealand with a stop on Anholt before arriving on Læsø (Copenhagen Air Taxa). Compared to the ferry, however, this is an expensive option; the price for the flight is about 1500 DDK, which is about twice the price for a car on the ferry (Copenhagen AirTaxi, 2020). Furthermore, there are no flights during the winter between November and March.

If one lives on Læsø and works in North Jutland, it is possible to commute from Læsø to Frederikshavn for work by ferry, however, one would be away from home for more than 12 hours to cover an 8-hour working day. The earliest ferry trip is at 6 am and the final trip returning to the island at 8.30 pm. The ferry schedule varies around holidays and during the tourist season, therefore, there are more frequent departures during summer. Upon arriving on Læsø, there is a free bus service from the ferry to any place on the island (Læsøfærgeren, 2020).

### 3.1.2 Welfare institutions and public services

On Læsø, there is one public school. Children on Læsø can attend school from the 1<sup>st</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> grade, entailing that children between the age of 6-15/16 years old can attend school locally. The school on Læsø is a small school in the Danish context, and in 2018 the school had 195 pupils. Children up till 6<sup>th</sup> grade have the option to attend afterschool club in the afternoon (Læsø Skole, 2020). There is also a youth club in connection with the school, this caters to children and youth between 13-16 years of age and offers different spare time activities (Læsø Skole, 2020).

The regional clinic has two doctors, two nurses and two medical secretaries and provides consultancy and treatment for minor everyday health issues. For medical emergencies, the helicopter ambulance service flies patients to North Jutland to receive hospital treatment. As such, this is not dissimilar to living on the mainland, except patients are picked up in a helicopter rather than an ambulance. On Læsø, homebirth is common and the local midwife is there to assist in the delivery of the baby, which is very different from the mainland, where most births are in hospital. For the elderly, it is possible to live at the local nursing home or receive homecare if extra help is necessary, which is no different than on the mainland (Læsø Kommune, 2018).

### 3.1.3 Labour market characteristics

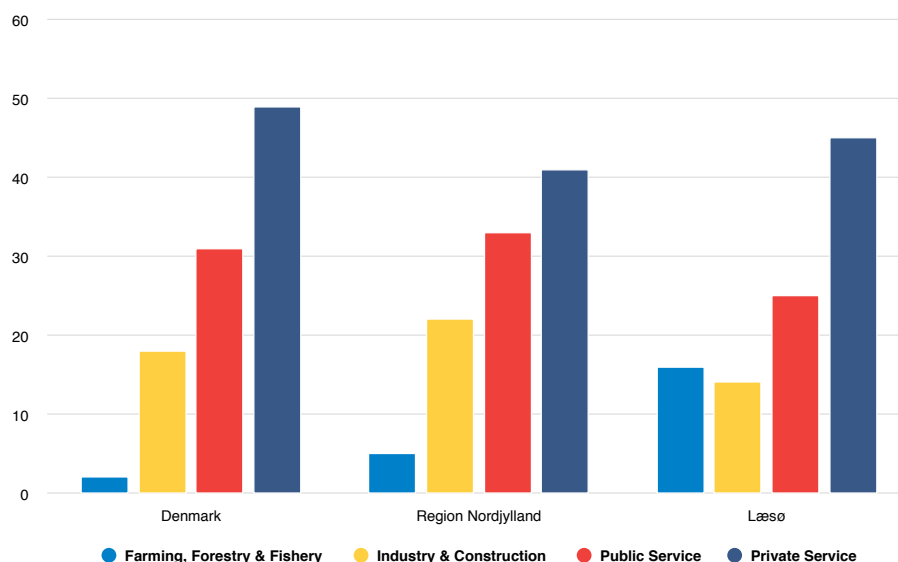
In terms of the gendered division of labour, Læsø has historically stood out from mainland Denmark. This is described and discussed by local historian Bjarne Stoklund in his book *Work and Gender Roles in Læsø ca. 1200-1900* (Stoklund, 1988). As Stoklund explains, one reason for the unusual gender arrangement was that men from the island often worked at sea, being hired as seamen, often on-board vessels which were away for long periods of time. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, it was thus tradition that the family farm was inherited by the oldest daughter and not by the son, as was otherwise the tradition in most parts of Denmark at the time (Stoklund, 1988, p. 36). Another reason why women inherited the farms was the fact that women constituted a majority on the island, entailing that during the period 1750-1880, there were many unmarried women who owned their own property. The preponderance of women in this period was partly due to several men moving to Aalborg (largest town in North Denmark) to be hired for work on-board ships. At the

same time, the navy also engaged in extensive compulsory recruitment, which made many men leave the country to avoid being enlisted. During this period, the population on the island decreased, and it was not until the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century that the population figures returned to the same level as the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century. As men worked at sea, women were the ones working on the farms. Even those men who were not at sea, worked at the harbour with fishery and salvage work.

Later on, in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, immigration of men from North Jutland to the island became a significant phenomenon. Work was still divided in men's and women's work, but now there was also work for the immigrating farmhands from North Jutland – who mainly took on work which local men did not want themselves. Overall, labour divisions in Læsø were thus both gendered and place specific. Another major difference between mainland and island labour division was that the women were in charge of the transportation and the horses, therefore, if a family was attending church, it was common for men to sit in the back and the women were coachmen. The sight of women in the front seats on the horse-drawn carriages, with men behind them, was so unusual at the time that outside observers such as C. Rasmussen from Copenhagen in 1858 remarked this in his diaries of island life (Stoklund, 1988, p. 44). But, as Stoklund drily remarks, it has historically been common that women could carry out men's tasks, but men could not do women's tasks (Stoklund, 1988, p. 45).

In turning the focus to present day labour market realities in Læsø, the table below highlights which sectors the population on Læsø works in, in comparison with the region of North Denmark as a whole (comprising 10 other municipalities besides Læsø), and the country in its entirety. The private service industry (dark blue bars) is the largest industry on the island, which is related to Læsø also being a tourist attraction, with attendant need for hotels, restaurants and shops etc. (Region Nordjylland, 2020b). However, comparatively speaking, farming and fishing (light blue bars) are still important for overall employment in the island, and much more important on the island than for the national labour market as a whole.





**Figure 3: Employment by sector 2018, Læsø and the region of North Jutland in Denmark**

(Source: Region Nordjylland – erhverv og beskæftigelse & Statistics Denmark)  
Reproduced with permission.

Almost 50% of businesses on Læsø have only one employee, whereas less than 5% of businesses have more than 20 employees (Region Nordjylland, 2020b). The GDP of the island was 296,000 DKK (approx. 40,000 Euro) pr. inhabitant in 2015, and this actually places the island among the upper half of the region, with the regional urban centre Aalborg at the top of the scale with 332,000 DKK (approx. 44,000 Euro) per inhabitant. Nevertheless, the island faced an economic deficit for the fiscal year 2019, leaving it under threat of direct administration from the national government (Jørgensen, 2018).

Looking at the educational level of the island's population, Læsø falls below the average of the rest of the country. In 2016, 36% of the population on Læsø had primary or secondary school as their highest level of education – for the rest of the country, this figure is 26% (Region Nordjylland, 2020b). Furthermore, only 19% of the population on Læsø has obtained university level education, whereas the average for all of Denmark is 37% (Region Nordjylland, 2020c). Another current challenge is the size of the workforce, which during the period 2013-2015 has shrunk by 2.8%. Here Læsø holds a national low record, as the size of the workforce for Denmark as a whole increased by 1.5%. Current labour market challenges are also visible in unemployment statistics for Læsø: in 2016 the unemployment rate was 6.5%, compared to a national average of 4.2 % (Region Nordjylland, 2020a).

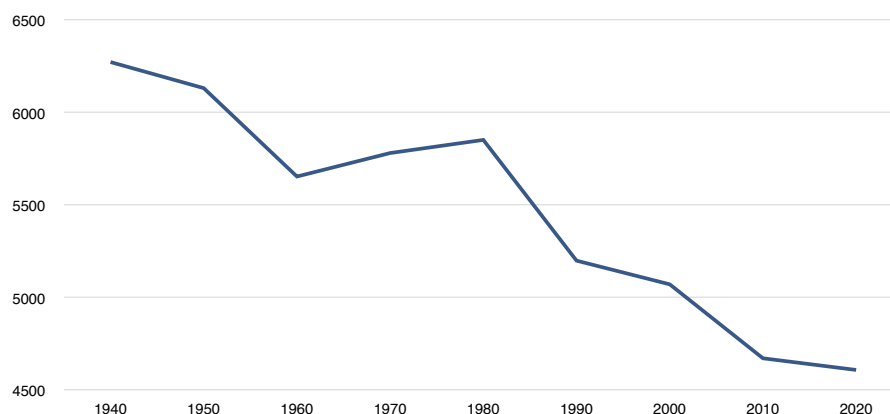
## 3.2 Location description: Suðuroy, Faroe Islands

### 3.2.1 Location, demographics and mobility

Situated in the middle of the North Atlantic Ocean, the Faroe Islands are surrounded by sea for hundreds of kilometres. Geographically, the Faroe Islands are relatively isolated, despite a modern transport infrastructure. The most southern of the 18 islands is that of Suðuroy and it covers 167 km<sup>2</sup>. With a population of around 4,600, the population of Suðuroy presently comprises 9% of the total population (51,000) of the Faroe Islands (Statistics Faroe Islands, 2019). Although almost 1/10 of the Faroese population reside on the Suðuroy, demographic and economic challenges are a reality for the island. Suðuroy has two major towns; the municipality of Vági has over 1,300 inhabitants and that of Tvøroyri has over 1,700 inhabitants. There are 11 other villages on the island with populations ranging from 15 (Akrar) to 595 (Hvalba) (Statistics Faroe Islands 2018)

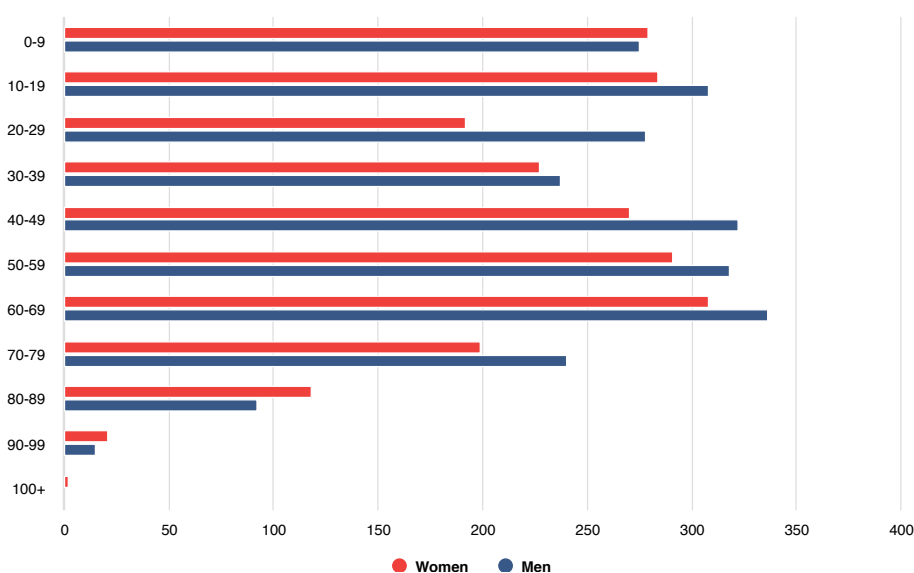
The infrastructure of the Faroe Islands is highly developed, both internationally and domestically. The islands of the Faroes are positioned quite closely together and almost 90% of the population is connected by means of roads, mountain tunnels, and subsea tunnels. From the capital of Tórshavn, where around 40% of the population lives, the longest journey by car is around 90 minutes. Consequently, many people in the Faroe Islands, despite residing outside the capital, can participate on the central labour market. Suðuroy, on the other hand, is in a different position. The main connection to and from the island is a two-hour ferry journey from Tvøroyri to Tórshavn. There are two or three daily departures from Suðuroy to Tórshavn and back, depending on the day of the week. Therefore, daily work commuting is cumbersome, if not impossible for most people. For the residents of Suðuroy, this has implications for employment opportunities as well as general mobility (Hayfield, 2018).

Around a century ago, Suðuroy was considered one of the most advanced local economies of the Faroe Islands. There was a lively industry, mainly attributed to fishing activity on the island (Joensen, 1985). As a result, the population of Suðuroy grew considerably, and from 1880 to 1922, the growth was around 25% each decade. In the early 1920s, almost 23% of the Faroe Islands population lived in Suðuroy (Holm, 2007), a significant contrast to the corresponding 9% today. The population peaked in 1950 (6,200) and has since decreased by 27% over a 70-year period (Holm, 2007). More importantly, this trend is of concern as the population of Suðuroy continues to decline, while that of the Faroe Islands has grown substantially of late (Municipalities of Suðuroy, 2018).



**Figure 4: Population trend Suðuroy 1950–2018** (Municipalities of Suðuroy 2018)

Demographically, the population composition of Suðuroy has given rise to concern. Fewer children are being born and the ratio of under 40s/over 40s indicates that the population is aging faster than in the rest of the Faroe Islands. Furthermore, the ratio of pensioners (67+ years) to people of working age (16-66 years), indicates that in 2018 there was 3.1 persons for every pensioner, down from almost five in 1985 (Municipalities of Suðuroy, 2018). The corresponding figure for the rest of the Faroe Islands was 4.1 in 2018. In practice, this means that fewer people in Suðuroy are labour market active and the population is older. The unease concerning the demographic trends of Suðuroy is also apparent in the ratio of women to men. Figure 5 illustrates the age and gender distribution on the island.



**Figure 5: Age and sex population distribution on Suðuroy 2018** (Statistics Faroe Islands 2018)

The table highlights that, in every age category, bar the over 80s, there are more males than females in Suðuroy. In total, the female deficit becomes significant. For many of the Northern geographically isolated areas there are fewer women than men (Hamilton & Otterstad, 1998), and the same is also a concern for the Faroe Islands generally. However, as with the other demographic indicators, the female deficit is more pronounced in Suðuroy. There are 89 females for every 100 males (ages 0-69), a concern for the reproductive sustainability of the island (Statistics Faroe Islands 2018). The corresponding figure for the Faroe Islands is 92 females for every 100 males. In summary therefore, there is cause for concern for the demography of Suðuroy, not merely as a place in a geographically isolated island community, but also a potentially threatened periphery within the Faroe Islands.

### 3.2.2 Welfare institutions and public services

There are five schools in Suðuroy. Two provide schooling up to 7<sup>th</sup> grade, one up to 9<sup>th</sup> grade and two (Tvøroyri and Vágur) up to 10<sup>th</sup> grade (Mentamálaráðið, 2018). The 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade correspond to lower secondary schooling and upon completion of 10<sup>th</sup> grade, pupils are 16/17 years old. The upper secondary school in the village of Hov, *Miðnámsskúlin í Suðuroy*, caters for the whole island and provides general secondary education. Presently, there are around 100 pupils in the upper secondary school, which means that most young people in Suðuroy attend upper secondary in Suðuroy, rather than moving away for secondary education (Fagralón, K, personal communication, 2018).

In addition to *Miðnámsskúlin í Suðuroy*, there is an educational establishment, also in Hov, *Heilsuskúli Føroya*, which offers post primary level qualifications within health work. *Heilsuskúli Føroya* caters for the entire Faroe Islands and has 80 pupils. Another attempt to bring people to the island was with the establishment of an outdoor, recreational sports folk high school for young people aged 17 and over. The school has proved popular, being unable to accept all applicants for the limited places the school offers. Due to open in Autumn 2020, a creative and sports boarding school will be opening in the town of Tvøroyri.

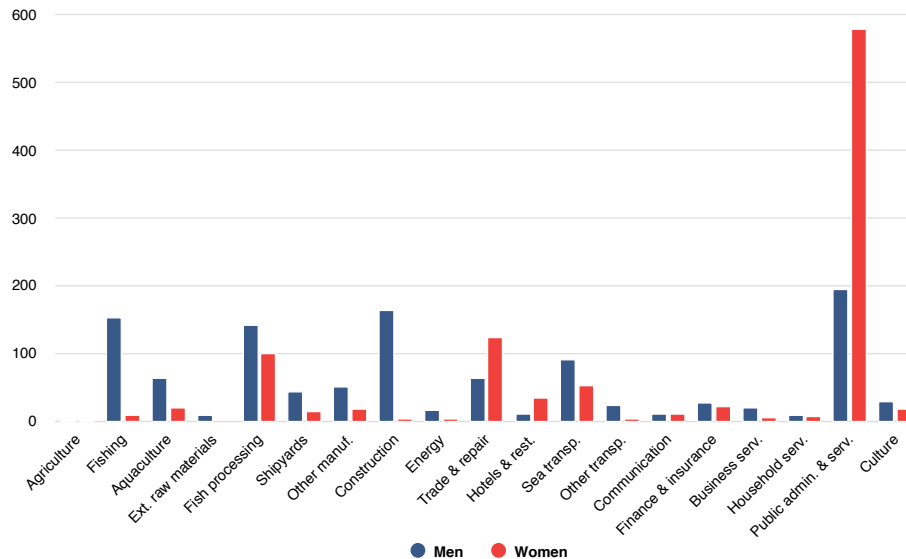
Despite its small size, there is a hospital in Suðuroy. For some years, there has been much political debate in the Faroe Islands concerning the structure of the Faroese healthcare system. This is particularly with reference to the feasibility of having three hospitals for the mere 51,000 people. This led to a government report concerning the future structure of the healthcare system (*Almanna- og Heilsumálaráðið*, 2007). The report concluded that there was a need to have a hospital in Suðuroy, albeit with some adjustments to services provided, the management structure, and level of cooperation between the three hospitals. One key argument to maintain the hospital in Suðuroy was based on the location and inaccessibility to Tórshavn. More recently, the maternity ward at Suðuroy hospital was transferred to Tórshavn. The implications are that pregnant women must relocate to Tórshavn four weeks prior to their due date.

Suðuroy provides childcare facilities, comparable to that of the rest of the Faroe Islands. This means that municipalities are obliged to offer nursery places for children from around 9 months until school age. To boost employment in Suðuroy, certain public sector organisations have been relocated from Tórshavn to the island. Examples include the Faroese official transportation organisation, *SSL* (responsible for national public transport i.e. busses and ferries) and a division of the tax revenue

office (TAKS).

### 3.2.3 Labour market characteristics

Suðuroy has a long history of industry and involvement in the fishing industry, i.e. fishing vessels, fish factories and derived industries (Joensen, 1985). As the welfare sector has evolved in the Faroe Islands, this has led to an increase in employment opportunities in the public sector as well. The chart below provides an overview of the distribution of women and men across various business sectors in Suðuroy.



**Figure 6: Employees in Suðuroy distributed across business sectors and sex 2017**  
(Statistics Faroe Islands 2018)

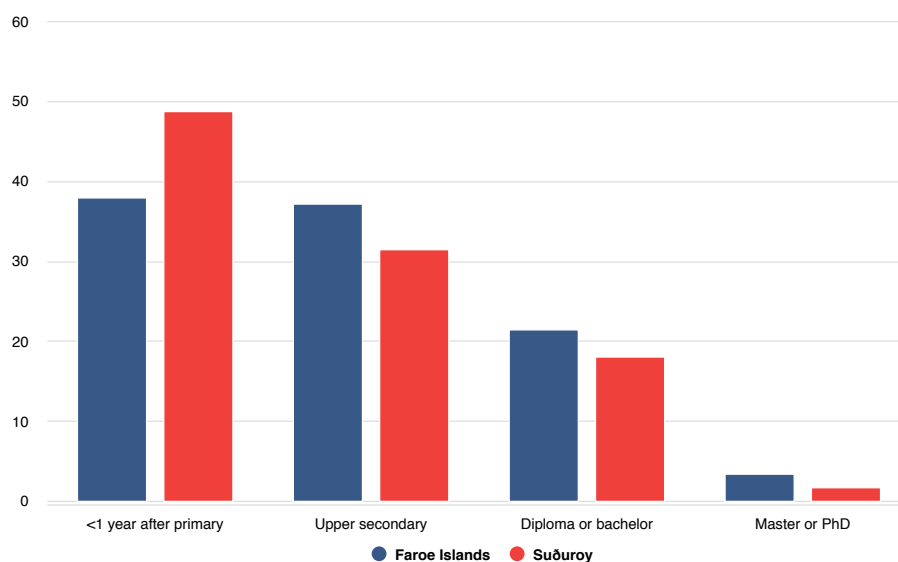
The most striking feature of the chart is the many women employed in the public sector. Men are more likely to be in the private sector and especially in fishing, fish processing, construction, and sea transport. This provides a picture of a gender-segregated labour market.

In terms of wages and unemployment, Suðuroy is more disadvantaged compared to the rest of the Faroe Islands. Whilst the population of Suðuroy accounts for over 9% of the total Faroese population, the wage payments amount only to 7%, the largest difference in the Faroe Islands, both relatively and in percent. Suðuroy has the highest full-time unemployment rate in the Faroe Islands (Municipalities of Suðuroy, 2018), despite there being almost full employment elsewhere in the Faroe Islands.

Per August 1<sup>st</sup>, 2018, unemployment figures for the Faroe Islands were 1.3% for men and 1.9% for women. The equivalent figures for Suðuroy were 3.2% for men and 4.8% for women. Consequently, not only are people in Suðuroy more likely to be unemployed; unemployment is gendered. The gendered nature of unemployment is evident also throughout the Faroe Islands. Hayfield (2018) found that women with children across the Faroe Islands face cultural expectations that they work closer to home. In practice, this means that it is less acceptable for women to commute for

work, compared to the expectations for men. Consequently, not only is access to the central labour market troublesome, gendered norms may also reduce women's participation.

Many employment opportunities requiring higher qualifications are located in the central labour market in Tórshavn. As a result, it can be difficult for the highly qualified to find work in Suðuroy (Føroya landsstýri, 2013). This is reflected in the educational level of the population of Suðuroy, who have, compared to the rest of the Faroe Islands, lower educational qualifications, as highlighted in the chart below.



**Figure 7: Educational level in the Faroe Islands and Suðuroy in % of population 15 years and over** (Statistics Faroe Islands 2018. Figures from 2011 census)

Businesses operating in Suðuroy experience considerable challenges because of distance to the centre of the Faroe Islands. Many goods produced in Suðuroy need access to fast and reliable transport. This is especially relevant for products for exports, e.g. fresh fish for export. There are limited departures from Suðuroy, and delays may occur due to harsh weather conditions. Some have argued that Suðuroy should focus on developing businesses in trades and industry, which supply goods and services outside the island, i.e. internationally or within the Faroe Islands (Holm & Mortensen, 2007). This would leave businesses in Suðuroy less reliant on the internal economic opportunities on the island.

There has been a vast increase in tourism in the Faroe Islands, and for the period 2013-17, overnight stays increased by one-third (Statistics Faroe Islands 2018). Although Suðuroy has received more tourists during this period, the opportunities for a tourism industry in Suðuroy remain under-exploited. Therefore, the municipalities of Suðuroy are in the process of developing an overall strategy for tourism for the island (Municipalities of Suðuroy, 2018).

### 3.3 Location description: Narsaq; Greenland

#### 3.3.1 Location, demographics and mobility

Narsaq is located in southern Greenland and is the second largest town, while Qaqortoq is the largest town in Kujalleq Municipality, following the Greenland municipal amalgamation in 2009. Narsaq is at 61 latitude and covers a total area of 8,500 km<sup>2</sup>, out of which 1,500 km<sup>2</sup> consist of seawater and fjords. Narsaq is on the border of mainland and coastal climate, which means that the climate in Narsaq is often characterised by fluctuating temperature and wild weather. Narsaq can be quite windy, as with the fierce and fluctuating temperatures comes strong winds. The average temperature is around - 5°C in the month of January and around + 7°C in the month of July, but with considerable variations. The average rainfall also varies during the year but is between 40-100 mm per month.

In the summer, the area around Narsaq is green and lush, where horticulture is also widespread. In Narsaq and its surroundings, vegetables and flowers are grown in open air and greenhouses. In the open air, it is mostly rhubarb and potatoes, while strawberries, lettuce, cucumber, and tomato are cultivated in greenhouses. Such opportunities for vegetable production are not generally possible in Greenland.

Narsaq town has 1,365 inhabitants, and there is an additional total of 199 inhabitants in the villages of Narsarsuaq, Igaliko and Qassiarsuk. Furthermore, there are a total of 67 inhabitants in the sheep farming places, which are inhabited only by individual families. With a population of around 1,365, Narsaq makes up 4.1% of the total of Greenland population of 56,171 (Greenland Statistics, 2019).



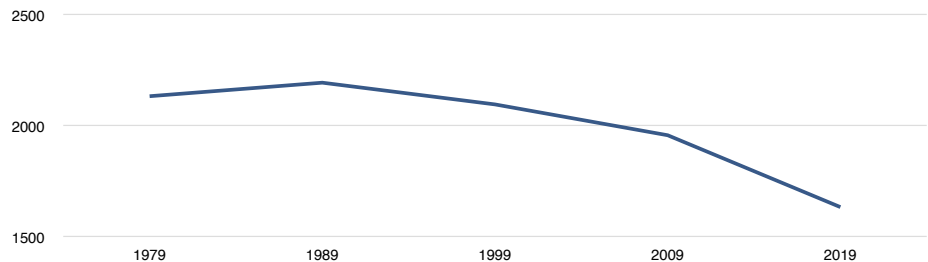
**Narsaq, with a view of the grocery store and the old municipal office**

The regional airport is in Narsarsuaq, which connects all South Greenland to the rest of Greenland and Denmark. Narsarsuaq was built as an airbase during World War II in 1941 by the United States, and was demolished as a US base in 1958. Greenland's

expansive geography and low population density mean that there are no roads between the towns. Therefore, in the whole country, there is only about 160 kilometres of road within towns. Land transportation, therefore, plays a minor role compared to shipping and aviation. The infrastructure in Narsaq, and generally throughout South Greenland, is different from Denmark and the Faroe Islands. Connections to and from Narsaq are by helicopter or boat, where from mid-March to early January one has the opportunity to sail with the coastal ship *Sarfaq Ittuk*, which sails to Narsaq once a week, where there is further connection to Qaqortoq (which is the southernmost destination for the coastal ship) or further north (Sisimiut is the northernmost destination). The distance between Narsaq and Greenland's capital Nuuk is 1,573 km (Asiaq.gl 2020). Airports and heliports are an important part of the infrastructure, as all traffic with passengers to and from Greenland is by air. Narsarsuaq and Kangerlussuaq airports are the main gateways to Greenland. Airports, heliports and helicopters also serve domestic traffic with passengers and goods (Greenland Statistics, 2019).

An important part of transport in a modern society is the digital infrastructure. With the fiber-optic cable from Iceland towards Nuuk and Canada, South Greenland has established a secure and highly efficient digital connection to the outside world. The municipality is aware that access to the Internet is vital for both towns, settlements and sheep farms in order to further develop the area, and the municipality is constantly working to improve connections.

On January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2017, new service contracts came into effect, where Air Greenland lost the passenger contract service in South Greenland, and henceforth it became Disko Line which services the area. The routes in South Greenland and North Greenland are on service contracts. But the scope of routes flown on non-commercial terms varies. The service contracts are generally renegotiated at intervals of a few years. The service agreement did not receive a warm welcome in South Greenland, as the population is already struggling to secure an airport to Qaqortoq, which is facing major challenges in terms of business and social conditions, leading to a constantly decreasing population. Also Narsaq itself has faced a steady population decline within the last 30 years, but this decline has been especially marked within the last 10 years, as seen in figure 8.

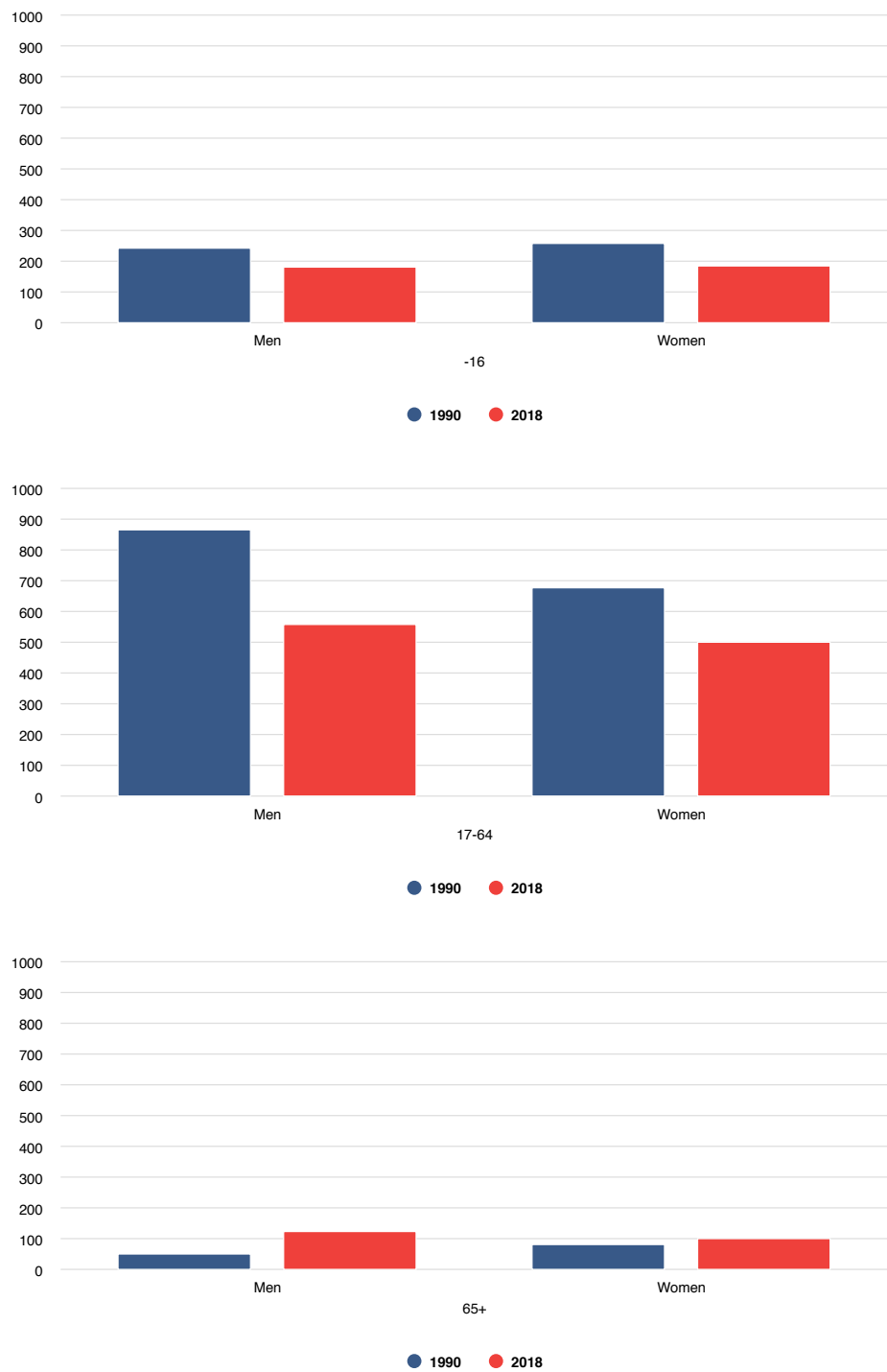


**Figure 8: Population figures for Narsaq 1980-2019** (Greenland Statistics)

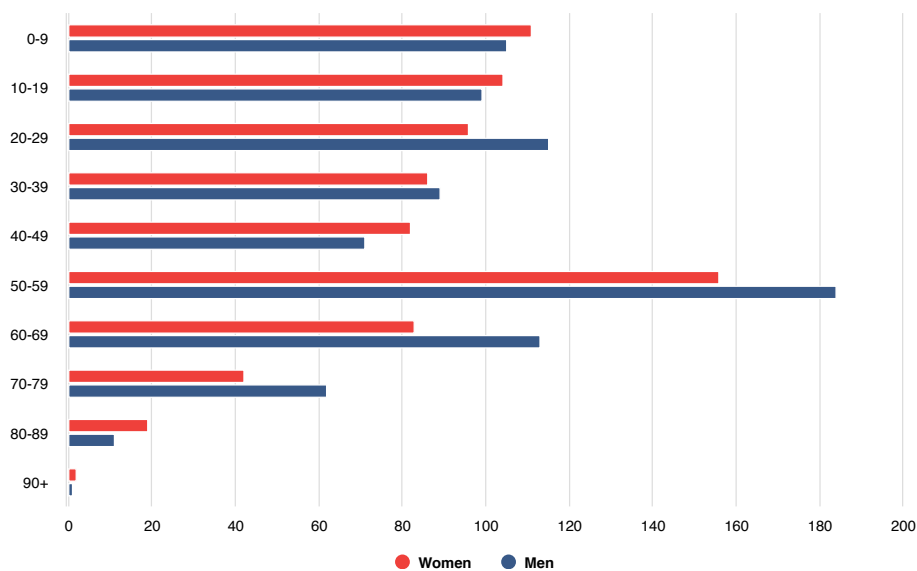
Demographically, the population composition of Narsaq has raised concerns. Fewer children are born, and the number of older people (pensioners) is on the rise.



**Figure 9: Demographic development in Narsaq between 1990 & 2018** (Greenland Statistics)



The figure shows that fewer children are born and there are fewer people of working age, while the elderly (pensioners) are on the rise. This means that there are fewer people in Narsaq who are active on the labour market and can contribute to the local economy. The number of men and women of working age has remained unequal throughout, although the gender gap presently is smaller compared to 1990, when there were more men than women in Narsaq.



**Figure 10: Age and sex population distribution on in Narsaq in 2018** (Greenland Statistics)

When we look at the gender distribution from 2018, the rise in men amongst the elderly up to the age of 80 is visible. There is also a sharp decline of people in the beginning of their careers, between the ages of 20-50. They might have left Narsaq to seek employment elsewhere or are seeking better childcare and school services, or a combination of these.

### 3.3.2 Welfare institutions and public services

There is one primary school in Narsaq (Narsap Atuarfia) which ranges from 1<sup>st</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> grade, and there are around 200 school pupils. The pupils also come from sheep farms and villages. There are about 25 teachers, some of them employed as teacher/temporary staff without teacher training. Pupils who have completed the lower secondary school diploma have the opportunity to take a upper secondary education (GUX) in Qaqortoq, where there is also student accommodation affiliated with the education, so that pupils travelling from across Greenland to study have a place of residence. It also is possible to take the upper secondary school diploma, if you have not completed it while young, in Majoriaq, which is a centre that functions as a link between education, the labour market and businesses.

In Narsaq itself, Greenland's only food college Inuili is located. Here you can be educated as baker, canteen staff, retail butcher, or within gastronomy, as receptionist or waiter. Inuili also offers courses such as counselling courses, or within cleaning and hygiene, which are used also by course participants travelling in from other towns in Greenland to acquire certificates. If the people of Narsaq want a different education to that which Inuili offers, they must travel to other major towns such as Qaqortoq or Nuuk.



**Narsaq Atuarfia - The school of Narsaq**

Narsaq has its own health centre, which has a 12-bed ward for general medicine. The health centre does not perform surgeries and acute/intensive patient care is transferred to other towns. The centre consists of an emergency room, pharmacy, laboratory, and medical consultation rooms. Women give birth in larger towns (Qaqortoq or Nuuk) as there are no midwives in Narsaq. Therefore, pregnant women are required to relocate and be separated from their families for at least 4 weeks prior to their due date.

Narsaq has one kindergarten (for children aged 3-6) and one nursery (for children up to the age of 3). The kindergarten has room for 60 children, which are divided into 3 rooms, the kindergarten has about 15 employees (including administration, maintenance, and temporary staff). There is room for 48 children in the nursery, which has 16 employees (including administration, maintenance, and temporary workers).

### **3.3.3 Labour market characteristics**

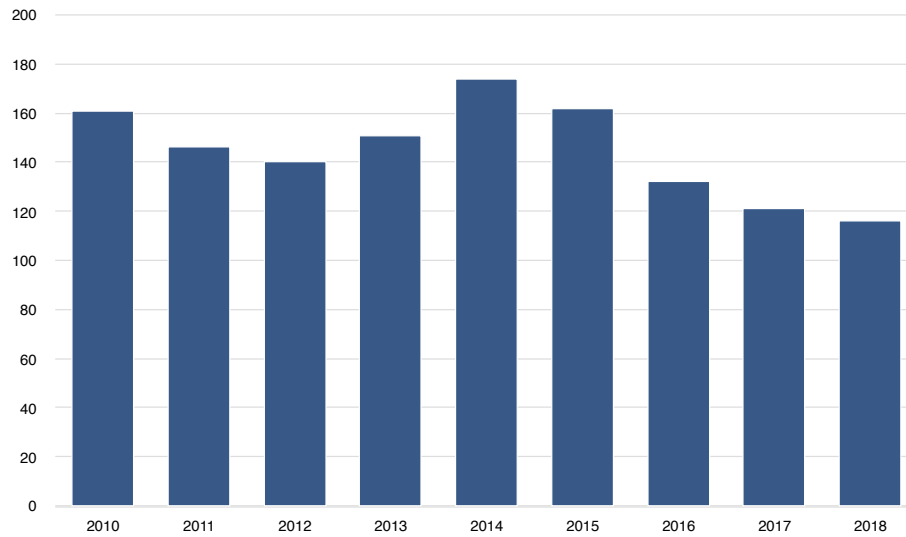
Narsaq was a vivid town with a population of approx. 2,000 from 1980-2005. The town had a butchery factory owned by Neqi A/S, a scrimp factory owned by Royal Greenland, and Eskimo Pels producing sealskin. One of the most important factors for the decline in population was that Eskimo Pels (sealskin production) and the shrimp factory owned by Royal Greenland closed for business, and the town thus lost 40 jobs in 2005 and 2006, respectively. Neqi A/S still runs a sheep slaughterhouse and employs about 80 people during the season, lasting approx. 11 weeks from mid-September. Neqi A/S has approximately 25 employees out of season.



**Neqi A/S in Narsaq**

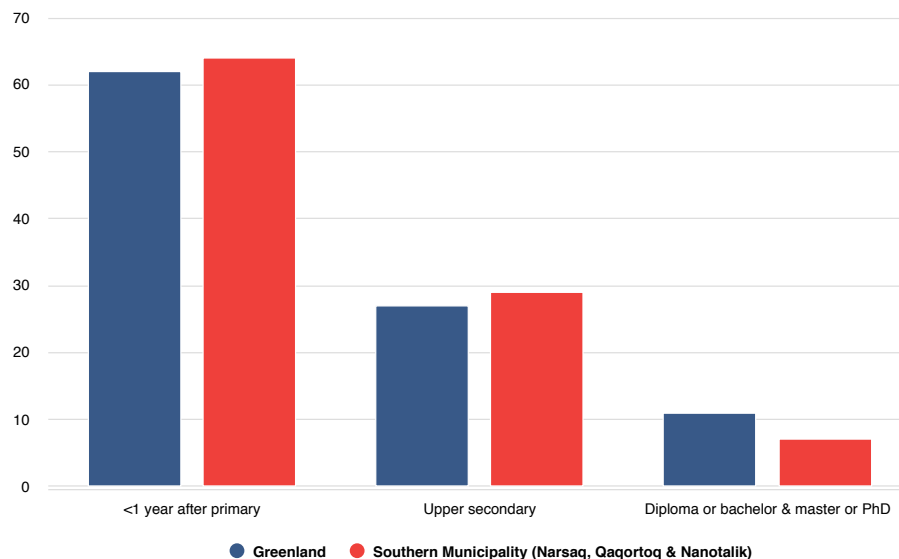
In 2008, the elections for the new municipality were held, which were the result of a new municipal and structural reform which entailed merging Greenland's 18 municipalities into four major municipalities. However, from 1<sup>st</sup> January, 2018, Qaasuitsup Kommunia was divided into two municipalities, so that Greenland now consists of five geographically vast municipalities. Narsaq Municipality was incorporated into the Municipality of Kujalleq as of January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2009. As seen in the table below, the municipal merger came at a time where the population trend was already downwards. Nevertheless, it is safe to say that this merger, and resultant loss of public workplaces, contributed further to the population decline in Narsaq. Following the municipal amalgamation in 2009 in the municipality of Kujalleq, several jobs in Narsaq were either cut or moved. Several administration and office positions in the municipality have thus moved to Qaqortoq, the new municipal centre. This has meant that more families in Narsaq have had to relocate to Qaqortoq to keep having a job.

Although figure 11 below shows that unemployment is declining in Narsaq, one must make the reservation that the population of Narsaq in 2010 was about 1,600 inhabitants and in 2018 about 1,300 inhabitants.



**Figure 11: Registered job seekers in Narsaq per year** (Greenland Statistics)

Narsaq is located in a region where the level of education mirrors the rest of Greenland. However, data from Greenland Statistics only allowed for a comparison between Greenland and the Southern Municipality as a whole, which contains Narsaq, Qaqortoq and Nanortalik as the three larger towns, in addition to several smaller villages.



**Figure 12: Education in percentages in Greenland age 16-74 and the Southern Municipality** (Greenland Statistics)

### 3.4 Location descriptions: Summary

The three locations of Læsø, Suðuroy and Narsaq share commonalities and differences, which provide insight into opportunities and the prospects for each of the locations. Læsø, Suðuroy and Narsaq are all located by the sea; Læsø and Suðuroy, however, are islands whereas Narsaq is a village in Greenland (the largest island on earth). Nevertheless, the sea is important for all three locations as a means of accessing central areas and as a place of work.

Læsø, Suðuroy and Narsaq have all experienced depopulation over some decades. Furthermore, with the depopulation has come an aging population. Whilst an aging population is a feature of Nordic countries generally, for geographically isolated areas this is especially evident, often due to out-migration of young people, who leave for education or work. However, as we saw in the case of Narsaq, out-migration is also explained by a restructuring of municipalities and the transfer of some public sector jobs to the larger town of Qaqortoq.

One key difference between Suðuroy, on the one side, and Læsø and Narsaq, on the other, is size. The population of Suðuroy is more than double that of Læsø and three times the size of Narsaq. Whilst all three places have small populations, the larger population of Suðuroy entails that the island is a more contained unit in terms of welfare services (e.g. Suðuroy has a hospital and secondary education) and everyday goods and services. This means that many young people are older when they leave the island, typically for tertiary education, whereas for Læsø and Narsaq young people who pursue secondary education must do so elsewhere.

All three areas have a skewed gender demography. However, a female deficit is more prevalent in Narsaq and Suðuroy compared to Læsø, especially amongst those of working age. Nevertheless, Læsø does experience a relatively large female deficit within the 20-29 age range.

The option to commute for work in central labour markets is possible for residents of Suðuroy and Læsø, at least in theory. However, this involves being away from home for at least 12 hours each day. For the people of Narsaq, on the other hand, this is not an option. Greenland is a vast and sparsely populated country in which physical mobility entails movement by sea or air and is very costly. There is practically no road infrastructure in Greenland, except within villages and towns. Therefore, commuting for work is not an option for people in Greenland and therefore, work must be located physically or virtually within the communities within which people live.

In terms of employment, the most important sector in Læsø is that of services. This is especially due to extensive tourism on the island during the summer season. Tourism is less significant in Narsaq and Suðuroy, although they represent growth sectors. The fishing industry is especially important in Suðuroy and is somewhat important in Læsø and Narsaq. For Læsø and Narsaq, farming plays an important role, whilst this is not the case in Suðuroy.

The relatively large public sector in Suðuroy is a significant employer, especially for those who are qualified within welfare occupations (e.g. pedagogues, teachers, nurses, and social workers). In terms of gender, the labour markets of Læsø, Suðuroy and Narsaq are gender segregated with the traditional industries of fishing, hunting (in Greenland) and farming being heavily male dominated, whilst the public sector is dominated by women.



## 4. Methods and dataset

As explained in the introduction, the project aimed at collecting experiences from both men and women living and working in geographically isolated areas, and we were particularly interested in work-life balance, gender relations, place attachment and experiences with generating an income/making a living in the local community. Hence, our objective was to interview both men and women, but we also had as a deliberate strategy to aim for couple interviews with spouses, whenever possible. In addition, our interest in the long-term demographic and economic trends in these areas also meant that we aimed for including as many perspectives as possible from youth in our data set – either through formal interviews or by various other data collection methods. At the same time, demographic, cultural and other disparities among our locations as outlined in the chapter above, entailed that we allowed for rather flexible data collection procedures, to make space for local particularities and viewpoints. Hence, this chapter contains a brief overview of the data collected in each of the three locations – data which is comparable on several dimensions, if not on all.

### 4.1 Læsø, Denmark

The dataset from Læsø was collected over two visits of approximately one week each in January 2019. The approach of gathering data was by interviews, focus group interviews, informal conversations, and discussions during various meetings. 33 people participated in formal interviews, spanning 19 interviews with anywhere from 1-5 participants. The 19 interviews include 11 individual interviews and six couple interviews, one focus group with five youth and two informal conversations, which in both cases were with people who did not wish their viewpoints to be recorded.

17 of the participants had moved to Læsø, two were at the time of the interview commuting from the mainland to Læsø for work (while still living on the mainland), and 14 were born on the island. In the dataset, the distribution of men and women were almost even, with 16 women and 17 men. During September and October 2019, we later added four more interviews with young people to our data set, two with youth attending a mainland school, and two with youth living on the island (all four of these interviews were conducted off the island). In addition to interviews, the data set from Denmark was supplemented by observational data obtained through attending two meetings in the local business association, two visits at the local youth club, one afternoon session at the knitting club, and a meeting in the town hall arranged by ourselves as a debate event focusing on how to attract new residents. Through attending these various meetings and events, we spoke informally to an additional 50 individuals besides those who participated in formal interviews.

With regard to age, the informants were between 14-75 years old, and for the most part the informants were over the age of 30 years old, although eight interviewees were below 25 years. The low number of youths in our original dataset led to the addition of four more interviews with young people, bringing the total number of interviewees below 25 to 12 individuals. The approach to data collection began with

us contacting Læsø's 'settlement consultant', who gave us the opportunity to participate in gatherings with business owners on the island. Through those events, appointments for interviews were made, and after this, some of the informants provided us with information about other people to interview. The interview sample is thus largely based on snowballing, although we also simply went into shops and other public places and asked people for an interview. Flyers were made with information about the project and contact information, and we went round the ferry on our first trip giving these to people – this way, we recruited three informants during our first trip on the ferry. These flyers were later put up on notice boards across the island, however, only one of our informants made contact through this channel. The focus group interview with island youth was arranged by the leader of the youth club upon our request. Both the youth themselves and their parents gave consent to their participation in the focus group.

## 4.2 Suðuroy, Faroe Islands

The dataset from the Faroe Islands was collected over four visits during the period of February and March 2019. Altogether, two weeks were spent on the island conducting interviews with adult informants and focus group interviews with young people, informal conversations and holding meetings with school and municipal staff. Furthermore, we received essays from young people about growing up on Suðuroy.

Altogether we interviewed 73 people. The 20 formal adult interviews were conducted with 12 couples and 8 individuals. In total, 32 people participated, 16 men and 16 women. All our adult informants were in relationships or married, bar three. Their ages spanned from 21 to 71 years, although slightly more than 60% were in the age bracket from 30-49 years. All our informants were labour market active at the time of the interviews. They were given a choice of setting for interviews, and most chose their own home, although occasional interviews were conducted in places of work, or the researchers' temporary accommodation on the island. All appropriate permissions were received to carry out the research and most importantly the consent from the participants themselves.

80% of adult informants grew up on Suðuroy. Yet, despite this strong connection to the island, almost all had at some point lived elsewhere in the Faroe Islands or abroad, mainly for educational or work purposes. The remaining informants had moved to Suðuroy from other places in the Faroe Islands, mostly with a partner/spouse, except for three, two from a Nordic country and one from a non-European country. All, however, have a spouse from Suðuroy.

In terms of educational background, 19% of our adult informants have primary school, 31% upper secondary/trade qualification, whilst 37% have a post-secondary diploma/bachelor and 13% hold a master's degree. If we include the young people (which would correspond to the statistics presented in Location description: Suðuroy, in which everyone aged 15 years and over are included) the percentages would be 64%, 14%, 16% and 6% respectively.

Five focus group interviews were conducted with young people, 41 youngsters in total. These were in the ninth grade, in lower secondary school and are 15-16 years of age. Prior to the group interviews, some pupils had written an essay in which they



were asked to reflect on Suðuroy as a place to grow up and their expectations for the future of Suðuroy. 32 essays in total were received. The group interviews were held in school libraries or vacant classrooms without the presence of teachers. For the young people, appropriate permission was obtained from the Data Protection agency, school authorities, as well as consent from parents and the young people themselves. We started by contacting schools and spent two days conducting meetings with teaching staff, school principals, and representatives from one municipality. During these meetings, we explained the nature of the study and received vital input and advice for our research on Suðuroy.

Our adult informants were largely obtained through snowballing, mostly by telephone. We contacted local businesses, large public sector employers, individuals we had heard of, and received additional contacts as the work progressed. Informants were recruited such that they were reasonably representative of the labour market in Suðuroy, i.e. spanning positions of hierarchy and professions such as teachers, nurses, pedagogues, social workers, fish factory processing staff, fishermen and other long-distance workers, self-employed and staff in the private sector in general. Participants received information concerning the research project orally and in writing in advance of interviews, and a further explanation was provided before participants signed the consent form.

### 4.3 Narsaq, Greenland

The data from Narsaq consists of interviews, fieldwork impressions and informal talks. In Narsaq we had one extended visit which allowed for some fieldwork in the town. Narsaq differs from the two other locations in the sense that it is a town which was the site of data gathering, and not an island. Reaching Narsaq even within Greenland is costly both flying and sailing to Narsaq. One can reach Narsaq from Nuuk, where Ilisimatusarfik (University of Greenland) is located. Staying in the town also takes its toll on a research budget. Narsaq does have accommodation for tourists even in the off-season. The data set consists of 11 individual interviews, mainly with a focus on women as entrepreneurs. The women were all easy to connect with and the interviews in general flowed well. Ahead of time we made sure that we were able to conduct interviews in either Greenlandic or Danish, which was spoken by almost all we interviewed. We never really found ourselves in a situation where we were imposing on a busy day. Narsaq was quiet during our visit. It was off-season and people seemed to enjoy themselves during the interviews.<sup>2</sup> Some of the interviews in Narsaq were rather short. We have found this to be the case with many interviews in Greenlandic. If the interviewer does not elaborate and ask more in-depth questions, the interview person will stop when assuming the answer is sufficient.

The age of the interviewed persons ranged from 24 to 68 years. Most interviewees were formally educated women with a majority having prolonged labour market experience. The majority were in management or middle management positions.

We researched the different people in advance by using positioning methods,

---

2. This reflection might be due to the fact that researchers in Narsaq commonly research marginalisation and the less brighter sides of society, where interviews and fieldwork tend to be slightly more gloomy than the enthusiastic and positive people we came across in Narsaq.

through looking up different businesses and searching for women in management. To a small degree, we used snowball methods once on location to get interviews with local small storeowners. All interviews were recorded, translated to Danish, transcribed and analysed using Nvivo. Furthermore, all interviews were anonymised.

#### **4.4 Joint workshop: Læsø, Suðuroy and Narsaq**

A workshop was held in Torshavn in the Faroe Islands on May 28<sup>th</sup>-29<sup>th</sup> 2019 bringing together participants from Læsø, Suðuroy and Narsaq. The workshop had 21 participants in total, of which 15 participants were local informants from the three locations, and the remaining participants the authors of this report and our respective research assistants. Most participants came from Suðuroy, but we had also invited guests from Narsaq and Læsø.

The themes of the workshop were business development/job creation, gender equality and settlement in isolated areas. The main aim of the workshop was to exchange experiences and ideas among participants from each of our three data collection locations. To this end, we had also invited some of the locals to present their various perspectives. Dennis Holm, the Mayor of municipality of Vágur on Suðuroy made a presentation about the work in his municipality to promote population growth. One of his main points was to create a community which fostered good memories, so that young people would have incitement to return to the area after having pursued education elsewhere. Christian Wennecke from Business Greenland gave a presentation on how to build small-scale businesses in Greenland, and how formal support from a professional agency with deep local knowledge can help support entrepreneurial spirit. Finally, the settlement consultant from Læsø, Stina Andersen, presented her experiences and ideas from her job on how to attract new residents, especially families, to the island, and how she specifically makes an effort to introduce newcomers to local networks.

In addition to these inspirational talks, the workshop was centred on having participants discuss various questions in smaller groups. The questions were, among others, 1) how to attract new residents of working age, 2) gender segregation in the local labour markets, 3) why people would want to live in a geographically isolated area, 4) future perspectives for the youth in the different areas, and 5) whether there are the same opportunities for boys and girls in the areas. The groups discussed the questions and shared stories from their different local areas, presenting highlights of their discussions in the joint forum. These discussions were recorded and form an additional part of the data set for our analyses.

## 5. Themes and trends in the three locations

In this chapter, we present themes and trends in the interview data as encountered in each of the three locations. In the subsequent chapter, we proceed to integrate findings from each of the three locations. For each location, we discuss the topics 1) flexible work lives, 2) family life and gender roles, 3) belonging, 4) attitudes to change and innovation, and 5) commuting and mobility. Some themes were more prevalent in one or two locations, some were raised across all three settings – the comparative differences and similarities will be elaborated in the next chapter.

### 5.1 Themes and trends on Læsø

#### 5.1.1 Flexible work lives

Obviously, regular full-time employment does exist on Læsø. Nevertheless, the overriding impression when speaking to islanders about their work, was that most people practised some degree of flexibility in their working lives. Thus, even people with regular full-time wage labour would often support a spouse's entrepreneurial efforts on the side, work overtime during summer when tourists hit the island, or take various other flexible approaches to time spent on work. Given our focus in this report on flexibility as a means to reach the goal of sustainable demographic development in these local areas, the focus of this first part of the analysis is on flexible work lives, subdivided into sections on seasonal work, changing jobs or professions and working flexible hours respectively.

##### 5.1.1.1 Seasonal work

The overriding story we encountered on Læsø – not only regarding work but also social life – was how different the island was when comparing summer and winter. Having deliberately picked January for data collection in the hope of finding more people with time to spare for an interview, many commented on how life is lead at two different speeds during winter and summer. One self-employed retailer even remarked to us, how she was happy to give us an interview to kill time – having her shop open for 8 hours each day, she said, "the only one who opened the door yesterday was the mailman. It's a damn long day". A couple running a family business together remarked how "we probably go into hibernation a bit during winter". This contrasted with the summer season, where most people related how working 12-14 hours every day of the week would be the usual pattern. Five young teenagers whom we interviewed at the youth club also said that all of them had summertime jobs in various restaurants and shops. They also commented on how life was simply more fun during summer, partly because more young people came to spend their holidays doing seasonal work on the island.

Most young people we talked to spoke eagerly about the summer as the most fun time of year – and also as the time of year where one would be more likely to find a

new girlfriend or boyfriend. Older people, especially those having had children, spoke about the summer season in more ambivalent terms. One shopkeeper said,

When it is summer, you have to be prepared to remain on the island, you do not move, you work, as long as there are tourists you work. After all, it is a bit of an obligation when you move to such a place, you cannot do exactly as you want [...]. One commits oneself a little differently than if you move out on the west coast, I think I have felt this quite a lot - that you sort of become part of an image [which the island needs to present to outsiders].

Part of this image the island shopkeepers are attempting to present to tourists is that of being welcoming and open for business. We discovered that many shops did not really have regular opening hours per se, but simply placed a flag outside the door whenever open. This, of course, is a very visible sign in the street regarding who is at work and who is not. And as related by the shopkeeper above, certainly during summer there would be an expectation among locals that you contribute to this image of being open for business; "one must commit to giving a good image of the island", she said.



**The flag is out to signal that the store is open for business**

Others reported thriving with seasonal changes in workload and activity levels. One female shopkeeper said, "This is also what I like about the island, I like that diversity. I like it like crazy when it all just swarms, it's just so cool. But when you've had a period that's been like that, it's also fine if you go into a period that is a little quieter, I like the variety". Several of the people who reported thriving with this kind of variation in their workloads also related how they tended to go on holidays during winter rather than summer, when it would be "impossible" to leave the island. Others did, however, comment on how this pattern was not always compatible with having children of school age, particularly because when the children would have time off from school, the parents would be most busy. Thus, for those working in the highly tourist

dependent sectors, it was somewhat at the expense of family life.

One male store manager, having recently moved to the island from Copenhagen, discussed how the extent of seasonal variation had surprised him, despite having been warned in advance. Coming from a similar job in a similar store near Copenhagen, he had picked this job-opening based on a motivation to lead a less stressful life, and he had accomplished his goal of "mentally gearing down". Nevertheless, he still saw challenges that needed addressing, among these not least seasonal variations in bustle. This was one debate he and others had taken up during the meeting in the local business association, which we had all attended a few days prior to the interview. Picking up on this theme, he said

The challenge I see here, is that many take on that attitude 'Well, now the season is over, we will all close'. There are some who are trying to fight a little to extend the length of the season, and also want the stores to stay open a little longer. [...] Nobody asks 'Could you do something here during the winter season that could attract a different type of guest than those who necessarily only want to come in the summer?' [...] And I have to admit that during four to five weeks, when you come in in the morning, people stand there waiting for the store to open and all day there is a queue at the checkout, right until you go home in the evening. I hadn't thought so. I thought it was going to be more spread out [...] I also think there are many who dare not move over here because they are afraid of the winter season 'What should we do?', 'How will we pass time?' and so on.

Perceiving the island as "boring" or even "dead" during winter was a common theme among young people we spoke to – both those still living on the island and those having already moved away. "It can get very boring. It quickly turns into routine. There are not really new initiatives" (young person attending school on the mainland).

#### 5.1.1.2 Changing jobs

While some deplored a perceived lack of initiative, others were full of such initiatives, and deliberately pursued a tactic of trying out new things if current working life arrangements did not work. Hence, we came across a number of interviewees who were originally educated or trained within one profession, but had later changed tracks and/or reported that they would do so, if current efforts failed to provide them with a reliable income or satisfactory life situation. Probably the most dramatic change in career we came across on the island was the ex-Copenhagen banker turned into island shepherd. Relating how she had simply fallen in love with the island and its lifestyle during a working holiday as volunteer shepherd, she reported being extremely happy with her change in career. "Now my everyday life is filled with sheep, dogs and fencing", and she did not miss the bustle of city life one bit!

Others had also taken a leap of faith and chosen island life first and foremost, in some cases letting jobs be second priority. In one case, we spoke to a couple who had decided to move to the island without having a job secured in advance.

It wasn't hard to get a job. As soon as anyone heard that we were coming, we were actually contacted by the guy [...] who was chairman of business and tourism. [...] He called us and asked, 'If we needed help finding jobs, then he could take us out and present us'. So, we were like 'okay, super great, how hard can it be?'

Several we spoke to expressed the attitude that "if you want to work, there is work to find". Nevertheless, this would in many cases be jobs that required fewer skills and less education. This was somewhat problematised by a local man we talked to.

Originally coming from the island, he had pursued a university level education and had worked on the mainland for years, before being directly approached about taking on his current job. He remarked that his current position was probably the only one job on the island matching his education level. He said,

You have to be flexible, if you are, when you move over here, and really just jump at any chance, then there are much better options. Because then you can get three weeks there, then five months here, then somebody needs a worker there, and so on. I think some people find this fun. But if you come here and have an education and say 'This is the only thing I want to do', then it's not that easy.

Several – including people with professional qualifications of various kinds – reported that they would rather change jobs than move away from the island. Some even reported how they had deliberately pursued a strategy of obtaining as many formal qualifications as possible to ensure a variety of income possibilities on the island. One man, for example, had made sure to get certificates as lorry driver, taxi driver, bus driver, food handler and forklift handler in parallel with his vocational training on the mainland. He did this, because he knew he wanted to live on the island in the long run, and for example driving the island bus could always be a fall-back option. His wife said, "you need to be able to do a bit of everything". In the end, he now utilised none of his formal qualification in his work life, but they had certainly been helpful in carrying over between different jobs over the years – "the only job I still haven't held is Mayor!", he said with a grin.

While several men we spoke to reported doing odd jobs as 'arbejdsmand' (a Danish word which literally translates a 'workman'), we also asked some of them, whether they thought such work patterns were easier for men to pursue than for women. Some thought yes, others said that there would always be jobs for those willing to work. Looking across the data set as whole, we do indeed find examples of women who either pursued various unskilled or low skilled jobs in between periods of more regular employment, including waitressing and cleaning. Strikingly, however, there appears to be a rather gender-segregated pattern to these types of 'small' jobs. As a whole, the labour market on Læsø did come across as gender-segregated, even to the point of one young woman saying to us about jobs for women and men "you are either a carer or a fisher, that's what it is like". Taking an example of a woman who had originally returned to the island with clerical skills obtained on the mainland, she had first retrained for the care sector and later as a pedagogue to ensure employment for herself. The first round of retraining was spurred by a municipal effort, whereby local unemployed women were encouraged to attend a specially designed fast track course for professional carers much needed in the local health sector.

In this way, the local labour market on Læsø came across as paradoxically open for job changes, but still within rather narrowly defined gendered scripts regarding sector and job content.

#### 5.1.1.3 Flexible hours

Closely related to the first topic of seasonal work, many of our interviewees on Læsø spoke about working at different speeds and levels of intensity over the year. One couple running a tourism dependent business said that during summer they worked from 6am to 11pm every day. For the first 3-4 years as self-employed, they had supplemented their winter income by working as temps at the ferry company, "but then you find that you also need to just relax in the winter". Another couple we

talked to, working in the agricultural sector, were facing their third summer season on the island. Although not in tourism, they commented on how difficult it is to be reliant on a sector, which is also most labour demanding at the same time of year as the tourism business. During their first year, they had hired help, but wages go up on the island during summer, so this "ate up" large parts of their profit. Now their plan simply was to work harder during the summer. During winter, they supplemented their income with other jobs – for example, she was temping at the school for three months, and he had an online consultancy company which had some clients during winter. Another person in the agricultural sector said, "You don't become a farmer to become rich, it's a lifestyle, not an 8am-4pm job". He personally cherished working together with both his wife and his father (who lived on the neighbouring farm), and the fact that his children could generally walk in and out of the houses and stable buildings, and simply find an adult who had time to spend with them even when working. "After all, not many children have that opportunity".

Being a farmer is of course somewhat of a unique position (there are not many full-time farmers left on the island), and most others did discuss summer as especially challenging if one has children.

Because in the summer, we do not have time. In the summer, we do not have time to have children! Well, you haven't, everything happens during the summer season, no matter what you do; whether you are a bricklayer, carpenter, waiter, cook, cleaner it does not matter. It all happens in the summer.

As a consequence, the father in the quote, had decided with his wife that their children only be in half-time day care during winter, to make up for lost family time during summer. The plan was, then, that the parents would try to work at alternate hours during summer. "And then this summer, we have to see how we get ... then we have to get up a little earlier, and then drive off, then we will probably all see each other once a week".

### 5.1.2 Family life and gender roles

Questions of family life and gender roles, in many respects, go hand-in-hand with working life. As discussed above, working life on Læsø often demands a high degree of flexibility, especially if working within tourism or agriculture. Some saw this as challenging for family life, others felt it provided more freedom to plan their lives in ways less dominated by routine patterns. One woman who had arrived young to the island, before having had children, said,

My first encounter with Læsø was 'It's just so cool here!'. You know, you think it's different to come to an island. I also fell for Læsø in a big way. I just thought it was the coolest place to have kids, and so it was. I was on the beach every single day with two young children, I could go right there with two lunches and juice, and well ...

We also interviewed a couple who had recently moved from a mainland town with more than three times as many inhabitants as Læsø. Having pre-school age children, a major motivation for their move had been to find more time together as a family. They reported having both happier and healthier kids, who would now rather go outside to play than sit indoors watching television. When living in the mainland town, they had always been busy taking the kids to all sorts of leisure activities, "but here it doesn't matter" they explained. The reason why it did not matter was that such activities were already part of the programme in kindergarten.

All the leisure activities happen in kindergarten. Then they just come and pick them up in buses and drive them to folk dance, or else they go to the gym or go swimming



with the kindergarten itself, so you don't have to think about that in the evening. So, as parents, you don't have to concentrate on driving them to everything, and that's a whole different way of thinking.

Parenting is different on Læsø, many claimed. It is easier and more relaxed, you have fewer expectations to live up to as a parent and you can rely on help from your surroundings whenever needed. One example repeatedly mentioned is the local bus route – there is one bus and one bus driver on the island, and the bus is free of charge. Given that everybody knows everybody else, this includes the bus driver. Hence, some spoke of how you can have your child start riding lessons elsewhere on the island and send them alone on the bus from the age of six years, and still trust they get there and home again safely.

One need not worry when they get a little bit older when driving by bus and they cannot find their way home, then the bus driver will make sure they come home. We do not have those worries; one need not be afraid that one's child will not return home. It is safe being in a small community and everyone knows each other. No child is allowed to sit somewhere and be lost, someone will care. I think that is, well, insanely good.

Some parents of a teenage boy told us how he had been gifted a large sack of chicken feed a few days prior to our visit on the island. Not being able to bring it home on his bike, the bus driver had taken it for him and put it down on their doorstep when passing their farm. A service which would be unthinkable in any of the previous places they had lived in.

However, despite all the positive things parents had to say about bringing up children on Læsø, there was one aspect of family life in particular, which newcomer parents saw as challenging in living on the island. This is the fact that children have to move away from home at the age of 15-16 years old to pursue education beyond primary school. Most born-and-bred islanders did not see this as a problem, however. One elderly lady we spoke to at the knitting club said "you know, there are no 15 year-old boys on Læsø who do not know how to do their own laundry!". One mother, who was soon to see her youngest daughter leave, said, "then you move across [to the mainland], that's the condition". She simply saw this as a natural turn of events, also implying that it was probably healthy for both children and parents. "If you find it upsetting, then you should not have children on Læsø. We sometimes see people moving with their children. We will not do this".

The predominant attitude was that this was simply a fact of life on Læsø. However, we also came across two relatively young girls who both had experienced the move to the mainland as so difficult that they had given up on the education they had initially pursued. "I think many people are not ready to move away when they are 15 years old", one of them expressed.

Previously, there were perhaps better possibilities for remaining on the island and pursue a vocational training without having to leave immediately after primary school. We talked to a fisher, who had gone directly from primary school and out to sea. "I don't think I was mature enough to have gone to school [on the mainland]. I was running around down the harbour, that decision was almost preordained, but I do not know how I would have managed to be away from my mother at the age of 15".

This contrasts with the current system, where any type of education requires you to go to the mainland – even if training as a fisher, the proverbial local occupation. Hence, the local newspaper brought a story about two young boys who were the



first to join the Læsø fishing fleet as trainees for years (Østergaard 2019). Another male interviewee commented how demands and expectations for education levels had changed, inducing (almost forcing) young people off the island. "If you have to go to high school or business school, then you have to go over there. To get an education, you need to go ashore. You can probably get an apprenticeship at the fish factory or somewhere, but you still need some schooling today".



**The road to school takes most young people off the island**

The other side of the coin of having to send one's children 'across' as the locals expressed it, was of course that when they have grown up and come back to visit their parents – perhaps bringing along grandchildren – they would stay for longer durations. One person said that this provided more "quality time" with visitors, and another claimed that you could visibly tell on visitors that their heart rates would drop after a few days on the island.

The issue of family life is closely related to that of gender roles. Some of the families, having decided to move to Læsø to find more time together, also spoke of how they divided household related tasks between them. However, even more prominent than talking about the division of household and care labour, were discussions of how others – grandparents, but especially also friends and neighbours – would lend a helping hand with childcare. "We help one another. I hand over my children and then I bring some other people's children to school and we always know someone is looking after them". In a few cases, we met people who commuted a 7/7 pattern or 5/9 pattern to and from the mainland. One man working such a pattern said: "then I have the advantage of being at home with my family and then I am at home for 7 days and can take care of my wife and my children and the practical things". A woman working in a similar pattern explained how her mother would take over during her absence, "so she takes the kids when I'm not home, then she picks them up at half past one when they need to be picked up, and then when I'm home it is no problem".

We asked several interviewees whether they perceived the local labour market to be gender segregated. As already noted above, some certainly thought so, for example a young girl at the youth club said that "in my head, an electrician is a man". A woman even suggested that if her children were to live on the island as adults, she would need to advise her daughter to become a teacher or a pedagogue, and her son to become a carpenter or police officer. However, others also pointed out how there are many female entrepreneurs on the island, which is changing the image of what it takes to be self-employed, so it is no longer perceived as simply an option for skilled men with a background as an electrician, carpenter and such. One farmer also commented on how he would love to see more women pursue an education as a farmer, although he knew of none who would be interested. Later, the parents of a young girl told us that their daughter had in fact worked temporarily as a farm hand for him. They joked that their daughter was probably the only woman on the island able to manoeuvre a tractor – a skill she now utilised in another job.



**Fishing and the related industry is still important on Læsø**

We also had a super interesting debate about masculinity ideals and changing attitudes to hard manual labour with the local head of the fisheries association. Although the 42 professional local fishermen were all male, he believed the tone had completely changed in the almost 40 years, he had been in the profession. As a child, he hung out at the harbour and wheelhouses together with friends, running errands, buying beer and cigarettes for the fishermen.

They had better time, and whether that was good or bad, I don't know. After all, they always had time for us. When they stood there smoking and saw a couple of 12-year olds. It was nice for us, but I don't think it could have been good for family life many times, when people were down there. But today, people seem more stressed. People want to go home. Of course, it's nice that they want to go home to the family

Not only had the mood at the harbour and the priorities of the fishermen when ashore changed, he also spoke at length about how attitudes to security at sea had

changed dramatically within the last 20 years. "Just the fact that we are using life vests now". He said that in earlier times a 'real man' would be someone who was never afraid of anything, whereas today, a 'real man' would be someone who made sure to return safely to his wife and children.

The young people don't want to toil anymore. They want decent conditions. And so do I! But that's just how it was back then. Then you were told 'What the hell, why take one ... don't be lazy you slack, work harder! There is never anyone who has been harmed by hard work'. That was the mentality, and that's what I did myself.

He thought that these changing attitudes and the introduction of new technologies, which relieve some of the hard manual labour involved in fishing, is the way forward in terms of recruiting new generations of fishers at Læsø. Keeping up a fishing fleet on the island is important, both in terms of jobs provided at sea, but also ashore. Hence, the local langoustine producer was the largest private sector employer on the island, with 30+ staff in manufacturing and a handful of people employed in administrative jobs.

However, although the fisherman claimed that masculinity ideals have changed within fishing, a male newcomer to the island said to us that he had discovered that his lack of a hunting license was an obstacle to participate in community life. He had now enlisted on a hunting course to get the license which would allow him to take part in male bonding activities – and this was important for him, not just for social purposes, but also because he as self-employed was dependent on networking with anyone who might hear about available jobs. He exclaimed with great surprise in his voice that getting a hunting license was part of the school curriculum locally. Furthermore, the parents of a teenage boy also commented on how young boys on the island are expected to know how to drive a tractor and bait a fishhook.

### 5.1.3 Belonging

Belonging and community attachment were extremely prevalent themes in the interviews on Læsø – both among those born and raised on the island as well as among newcomers. One somewhat paradoxical twist to the question of belonging on Læsø is the fact that more or less everyone has lived off the island, at least for a while to pursue education. In this way, even those who identify themselves as islanders have never lived their entire lives on the island. This came across strongly in one of our very first interviews, where a 38-year old interviewee self-identified as local, despite having lived 32 years of her life elsewhere. In fact, the one interviewee whom we spoke to whom had probably spent least time off the island (less than two years), was probably also the most global in outlook among our respondents. Having married a foreigner, he was now a stepfather of children who regularly travelled between countries. Having worn his travelling shoes, he said about his household "we have a tri-lingual kitchen table", where conversations unfold in both Danish, English and his wife's native language.

Common to all interviewees, belonging and community feelings were expressed as values that are central to any decisions about long-term future settlement. Starting with a couple who were born and bred islanders, she explained how they had both left for the mainland to pursue education and then jobs within their respective fields of education.

It went on for nine years, and we were both working, along with a lot of other stuff going on. Then one day he comes home and says 'The Harbour Cafe is for sale. Shouldn't we buy it?' and then I said 'yes', and didn't really give it further thought, I

just thought I wanted to go home and live on Læsø, that's how it was, home to Læsø.

Despite having no prior experience in the restaurant business, they now ran a successful restaurant, a shop selling local delicacies and a few other initiatives they had taken on over the years. Another much more recently arrived business owner with no prior engagement on the island said,

There are many who claim it takes five generations to become a local, it probably does to be considered a native islander, but there I think they really got a bad reputation. There is a community feeling in a whole different way, and I feel that, too. It may also be something I imagine, but I feel that way when I sit on the ferry, 'okay, that's a local, that's a tourist'. And I haven't even lived here for a year, yet.

According to this interviewee, it was certainly possible to attain membership in 'the community feeling' also based on a relative short duration of stay. Another recently arrived woman, with previous experience of living in other island communities, referred to "the fact that you have a completely different relationship when you are an islander – people just show like a greater openness, and also a bit of a bigger mentality, this attitude that we look out for each other".

Thus, both newcomers and locals appreciated what they referred to as a strong community feeling. One young man who had recently opened up a business as self-employed put his sentiments about belonging on the island in the following way "I've always wanted to go home, and if this isn't going to be a business and we have to close, then I'll find something else to do. I'm not going to move from here". In his case, he put place of residence over and above income, partly because he saw it as the ideal place to raise any future children. The only ones who expressed any desire to move away were the youth we interviewed at the youth club. Here all five participants strongly expressed that they did not want to live on the island in the future. One of the girls mentioned two larger regional towns on the mainland, but said she did not want to live in either of these. "Not inside a city. It doesn't suit me, a little outside, a little out in the country, that's just me. But not over here either, but I don't think my family will be happy to hear this, because they all live here".

#### 5.1.4 Attitudes to change and innovation

Quite a number of interviewees on Læsø addressed the topic of reluctance to newcomers and new ideas. Interestingly, however, it was often old-timers rather than newcomers themselves, who argued that there was probably too much scepticism towards newcomers in general, and new business ideas in particular. For example, one born-and-raised local man said, "We are so intolerant towards people who do well", and another one commented on how locals should become better at welcoming newcomers. She said, "You must not know much more than those who are here already, nor can you come up with new ideas and such. If you do, you are bullied or stabbed in the back, and so people choose to move away". This sentiment was also echoed during debates at the town hall meeting, where one participant gave the following input:

Be better at welcoming newcomers, so that they feel welcome in our community, be it in establishing friendships, inviting your neighbour in, as well as being a good pioneer in the workplace to be aware of the diversity when receiving new colleagues. Newcomers can see new ways of doing things (nothing needs to be as it usually is) (Written response collected at town hall meeting)

This sentiment was also found on a poster we came across during our first trip to

Læsø, where it is tradition to put up statements with New Year vows during the night before January 1<sup>st</sup> each year. Hence, one of these posters was still hanging on the main square in the main town Byrum when we arrived, carrying the following message:

#### NEW YEAR VOWS 2019

- Stick together
- Invite in your neighbour
- Say hi to someone you don't know
- Support the locals
- Think before you speak
- Try something new
- Get someone to move here
- SMILE FOR LÆSØ



Læsø New Year vows 2019

Overall, a number of the locals we talked to expressed that Læsø as community could do more to welcome newcomers and combat the proverbial Nordic 'Law of Jante', which according to tradition dictates that 'You are not to think you're anyone special or that you're better than us'. Expressed differently in an academic context, Nilsen (2014) argues about entrepreneurship in Northern Norway that "Strong egalitarian values prevalent in the coastal communities in the north have hindered local entrepreneurial careers" (2014: 53).

We talked to a man employed in the municipal administration, and through this job, he had knowledge about at least three different business ideas, which had been presented to the municipal office by external experts, including university researchers. He could not for the life of him understand why nobody was interested in trying to realise any of these ideas (personally, he was already an entrepreneur on



top of his regular full-time employment). He had tried to push these ideas to potential entrepreneurs and put down the inaction to lack of courage and unwillingness to put in the necessary effort. According to him, there were plenty of opportunities for entrepreneurship on the island, and if people were reluctant to engage in it, it was due to unwillingness to be pushed out of their comfort zones rather than any perceived challenge to egalitarian values.

Despite Nilsen's assertion and sentiments expressed by locals, we did, as documented above, encounter many entrepreneurs on Læsø. They all mainly had positive things to say about how they were received. Nevertheless, some frustrations were expressed (given that we asked about resistance or downsides to being an island entrepreneur, this seems methodologically inevitable). Interestingly, most of the people we talked to among newcomers were in fact hesitant to express negative sentiments.

Now I get ambivalent, because some of what I think is extremely difficult up here is... I think we have been insanely well received, and we are probably also the types of persons that have also very actively chosen that we will not be a part of the intrigues, we cannot. But you sense sometimes that you are out of tune (newcomer, entrepreneur).

This particular interviewee spoke about people reproaching her for whom she interacted with on the island, saying things like 'why are you even talking to *him*?'. Others, however, said that the criticism was more likely to be vented online, not least on the various Facebook pages, which according to some were used for making sneering or even downright nasty comments. Thus, one local fisher talked about how people were almost divided in factions depending on which Facebook group they were on, and he commented how "the tone has become harsher". Although, as he said, this is probably true of many other settings besides islands like Læsø.

#### 5.1.5 Commuting and mobility

The ferry trip from Læsø to mainland North Denmark takes 1½ hour, the number of return trips per day varies between 3-7 depending on the day of the week and time of the year. This entails that commuting to and from the mainland on a daily basis is more or less impossible. Nevertheless, we did encounter a couple of people who did commute, however, not on a daily basis. One of these was a mainlander working in the local care sector. He had a schedule of 7 days on the island and 7 days at home, reporting that although challenging, his wife could not find relevant work on the island, and hence this was their preferred solution. Asking him about how he came up with this idea, he replied in the first instance that

It is a matter of just being hungry [for work] and wanting to work with one's profession. And then I heard that they were looking especially for health professionals on Læsø, and I can actually, from home from my kitchen window, look over here and then I thought 'how hard can it be?' Plus they were advertising with the Mayor on the radio, and he was advertising that they had commuter housing over here that you could rent. So I've rented one of the rooms.

Speaking more about this decision, it also turned out that he had previously had a colleague on the mainland who commuted from Læsø on a daily basis. This was tough, however. "You have to be able to just accept that 'Ok then, she will not come today, because the weather will not allow for it'".

The fact that the ferry would often not be able to run on account of bad weather was a hot topic on the island, and there were many debates about getting a better

(i.e. quicker and more stable) ferry. One local business owner said

One cannot live on Læsø and have a job on the mainland. Then you have to have very flexible working hours. If you had a commuter ferry so you could get off in the morning and be able to come home in the afternoon... I think that would contribute an incredible amount [to settlement levels]. There are many who would like to live on Læsø, but who have jobs on the mainland.



**The ferry is vital for island connections**

Another issue with the ferry was prices. At the time of our data collection, the Danish government had recently introduced a Road Equivalence Tariff ('landevejsprincippet' in Danish), which is a government initiative to support continued settlement on Danish islands. This is a transportation policy principle, which entails that it should cost the same to sail by ferry as driving a similar route by car. Concretely, this means that ferry prices had recently been heavily reduced, especially for private travellers. However, in terms of goods transportation, getting everything to and from the island via ferry is still costly, and for some retailers this spelled trouble. For example, we talked to two store managers whose stores are part of nation-wide chains with national advertising, both of whom said they could not always follow suit with competitors on the mainland. One of the store managers who sells tiles said he sometimes has a hard time explaining to customers why the tiles (as heavy goods) are necessarily more expensive in his store than in the mainland equivalent store. The one business manager who claimed that ferry prices only had very little impact was the CEO of the langoustine production company. Being a high-end product, spending 400,000 DKK (approx. 53,000 Euro) annually on transportation made little difference to their business model.



**In cases of emergency, there are several helipads on the island**

Given the low frequency and long duration of ferry trips, any medical emergencies on the island are responded to via helicopter transportation. Hence, heliports are placed along various stretches of the beach across the island. Some locals even claimed that Læsø inhabitants had quicker access to emergency hospital treatment than some mainlanders living in remote locations. The local settlement consultant, who had specifically been hired by the municipality to help boost the number of local residents, said questions about access to medical assistance are frequent topics potential new residents want to hear about, before making the decision to move to the island. "What if my kids get sick, what if I need to get to the hospital quickly? [...] Well, we are actually quicker at hospital from here, because of the two helicopters – there is both the civil defence and the medical helicopter".

### **5.1.6 Summary: Themes and trends Læsø**

Overall, impressions from Læsø were that although the island is struggling to retain its youngsters, people move to the island, also without a prior history and family connections to the island. The newcomers comprise both retired people who wish to spend old-age in the beautiful natural surroundings, as well as families (often with young children, but also couples without children), who are attracted to the idea of a less stressful life compared to elsewhere. Somewhat to our surprise, we found some newcomers had arrived without a job at their hands, and we encountered some who deliberately relocated with a dream of starting a business of their own. The latter also was the case for some of the young returnees interviewed for this study. Thus, there were many entrepreneurs among our informants on Læsø, although many of them also rely on supplementary incomes from other lines of work. Multi-jobbing and (maybe partially) working in other lines of business than what one was educated for, seemed rather common on Læsø.

Interestingly, many born-and-bred islanders were quite self-critical of the island's



ability to welcome newcomers, whereas most of the newcomers we talked to, expressed that they felt warmly welcomed in the community, which seems to offer a number of possibilities for partaking in both formal and informal networks and activities. Regarding gender relations, the national Danish pattern of a gender segregated labour market is also found on Læsø, with women dominating the public sector and men in extractive businesses (fishing and farming). However, we also encountered females working in the farming sector, and the fishing sector was reported to attempt to cultivate a less 'macho' and more family friendly culture. For many of the self-employed entrepreneurs relying on the tourism industry, it seemed less of a question of male and female work divisions, but more a question of seasonal variation, with family life on halt during the busy summer seasons. Læsø, overall, was reported as a good place to bring up children, and even if many of the young people we interviewed saw local labour market opportunities as limited by both place and gender patterns, some of the older interviewees pointed to the large number of female entrepreneurs as evidence of a versatile and adaptable labour market.

## **5.2 Themes and trends on Suðuroy**

### **5.2.1 Flexible work lives**

The labour market of Suðuroy provides a spectrum of jobs, including traditional full-time employment. However, many jobs in Suðuroy require islanders to practice various forms of flexibilities, be it through long-distance working, combining part-time jobs, flexible work hours, seasonality, and part-time work. Before discussing these further, we commence with an introduction to the labour market on Suðuroy.

The population of 4,600 is sufficiently large to warrant a range of basic amenities and public welfare services. Therefore, in terms of most immediate needs such as household consumption, manual trades, schooling (primary and secondary), nurseries, general practitioners, hospitalisation etc. the island is a self-contained unit. Consequently, employment opportunities in traditional trades (electricians, plumbers, joinery), retail and services as well as the public sector, form an important foundation of the labour market on Suðuroy.



**Kindergarten in Suðuroy**

Close to 800 people in Suðuroy work in the public sector as teachers, pedagogues, nurses, doctors, civil servants and so on. The size of the public sector in Suðuroy is slightly higher compared to other areas in the Faroe Islands. As many as 36%<sup>3</sup> of the working population in Suðuroy hold public sector employment, surpassed only by Tórshavn (the capital and surrounding area) at 39% with its central administration (Statistics Faroe Islands 2020).

For Suðuroy, the presence of the public sector forms a stable base to sustain an income for the people of the island. Public sector employment is highly gendered, with women holding three quarters of public sector jobs. However, this does not diverge from the rest of the Faroe Islands, where the gender division in the public sector is similar (Statistics Faroe Islands 2020).

The fishing industry is highly dominant in Suðuroy, encompassing work at sea as well as fish processing on land. The industrial past is closely related to the fishing industry, and despite a decline, this still forms the most important industry in Suðuroy today (Holm & Mortensen 2007), both as places of work and as identity. This was evident in interviews with informants and essays from youngsters, as the following extracts indicate:

Often they say that these high-up jobs, there is not so much of that. It is fish work and life at sea, if you are here. There are a few institutions and very few...well not much private sector work.

Interview, female fish factory worker in her 30s.

There are some labour market opportunities in Suðuroy. For people without an

---

3. There is a sizable portion of the Faroese working population which is not included in the total figure. These are employees who work for overseas companies (typically in the fishing, shipping, and offshore industries) and whose income is taxed overseas according to international multilateral tax agreements. In Suðuroy, the amount of overseas working employees is relatively high, which will be addressed later.

education, there are the large employers, Varðin Pelagic, Delta [fish processing factories], fish farming, the fishing industry and so on. For people with an education there is the hospital, schools, work for blacksmiths and so on.

Essay by youngster in lower secondary school, 9th grade.

Many jobs in Suðuroy are linked to the sea and it is, therefore, an important source of income for the island. Typically, these jobs entail long-distance working, in the fishing industry as well as off-shore and maritime-related industries. Such working patterns, being away for weeks or months at a time, however, are almost exclusively practiced by men. These work practices impact partners with children, who generally adjust their working patterns to part-time work (see also below) to accommodate family during times when men are absent. Women who work in the fishing industry rarely practice long-distance working, rather they are on land, in fish processing (see figure 6).

#### 5.2.1.1 Seasonal work

There is limited evidence of seasonal work in Suðuroy. Nevertheless, an element of seasonality is evident in fish farming and the pelagic (Mackerel) segment of the fishing industry. Furthermore, in the emerging and steadily growing tourism industry, there is much more work during summer months.



**Fish processing factory Varðin Pelagic in Tvøroyri**

Seasonal fish processing entails intensive working patterns with twelve-hour shifts. Many of our informants paid reference to the large fish factory, Varðin Pelagic in Tvøroyri, as an important employer. However, there was criticism from several informants concerning the long (12-hour) shifts, which they consider ill-suited for families. Our informants whose contracts stipulate such shift patterns spoke of working hard during the months of intensive fish processing (around half of the year) and less during the remainder of the year. For coastal places reliant on the fishing industry, the seasonality of certain fish species entails that work is adjusted to follow the mobility of fish (Gerrard, 2013).

Notwithstanding seasonality in fish factory work, fish processing is somewhat

unstable as there is not always enough raw material (fish). This means that over the course of the year, there are odd days or periods, when there is no work. As fish factory workers are paid by the hour, this impacts income levels. As a compensatory system to account for such seasonality, the unemployment agency of the Faroe Islands, ALS, provides a minimum income for days when there is not work. Given that most fish factories in the Faroe Islands are located outside the central labour market, the ALS system forms part of the income system (Dahlström et al., 2006), which can help sustain isolated areas.

The tourism industry is an added source of income for several of our informants. Few people live exclusively off tourism; however, our informants displayed hope that tourism can become a potential important future employer in Suðuroy. This is not least the case, as the focus in the municipality of Vágur in Suðuroy is to promote an adventure economy on the island, e.g. by means of a newly established sports and adventure folk high school, the recent opening of an indoor football pitch, and the only Olympic-sized swimming pool on the Faroe Islands. Furthermore, small cottages have been built which are available for tourists to rent. In the town of Vágur alone, from 2013 till February 2020, the bed count for tourist accommodation has increased more than 350%, from 37 to 168 (D. Holm, personal communication, 2020).

This focus on adventure tourism and the excellent facilities for swimming and indoor football has led to an increase also in domestic tourism (from elsewhere in the Faroe Islands). In other words, not only is the growth in international tourism for the Faroe Islands having a drip off effect on Suðuroy, but the Faroese are increasingly visiting Suðuroy. One of our informants works full-time in the tourism industry and has experienced an increase in demand off-season by catering for Faroese visitors, whose custom is less seasonal.

Some of our informants have identified the tourism industry as an additional source of income. These informants are predominantly, although not exclusively, self-employed, who supplement their income with services aimed at tourists offering e.g. boat rides, tour-guiding, cafés, home-based catering, and accommodation. The couple in the first extract below are both self-employed in trades and welfare services, but have an additional income from tourism during the summer months. The woman in the second extract works within the public sector and is not involved in tourism. However, both extracts highlight how Suðuroy is seen to hold potential for domestic tourism due to its more remote location in the Faroe Islands.

Ólavur: "Now they are saying that Suðuroy is to be prepared for tourists. That will be exciting to see." Sonja: "Just as we are a periphery, well in terms of work, then it [the island of Suðuroy] is also a periphery. Well, if people or Faroese are going on holiday, maybe not abroad, then they might come south [to Suðuroy] because it is very different compared to the other islands."

Ronja: "I think that before the subsea tunnel comes, one should try and utilise that we are this island, isolated island, and one can do packaged holidays...and you can take advantage of the situation, which is that if you come to Suðuroy, where you can't just leave, maybe kind of, how do you say, an island of experiences."

Our informants spoke extensively about long-distance workers, who are away from home for weeks or months at a time. Men practice long-distance working, and consequently, women with dependents consider it untenable for family life to work full-time. Long-distance work patterns, therefore, significantly impact gender relations. Furthermore, men who have long-distance employment, frequently earn enough to enable a partner to work reduced hours. Therefore, for several of our

informants, we can speak not so much of seasonality in such work, but more of rhythms of mobility (Cresswell, 2010; Edensor, 2011). In other words, long-distance working functions as rhythms of absence and being home impact the potential for women's labour market participation. In the following extracts, two informants, firstly a long-distance working man and secondly, a woman whose husband works long-distance, explain the cyclical nature of life for such families.

Mmm yes, since I got a wife and children and she works as [job title] and I am away half of the year. So, it is very difficult for her to work while I am away. So to give her some space, and I have always encouraged her to keep contact with the labour market, then I have taken extended leave [beyond regular time-off] a few times, so she could work...then she worked and I took care of our children.

Yes, well I have a great job...and when the kids were young, I always worked reduced hours, because my husband was away. And to get daily life to run smoothly, I have always worked a three-quarter fraction until, what is it, 10 years ago when the youngest was nine. In my job, I can also partly work in the evenings when the kids are in bed...But when the husband was home, then I did not do any such stuff [driving kids, housework etc.] then he sorts everything out. Yes, then I don't have to drive around, because he does it then.

We can see that for these informants, family life and labour market participation is tied to the cycle of long-distance working. Our female informant from the second quote, who is now in a managerial position, explained in the interview that she had chosen to wait to take on a management position until the children were older. Therefore, the strong presence of the long-distance working patterns in Suðuroy has clear implications for women's work.

#### 5.2.1.2 Changing jobs

Most of our informants have at some point or other lived away from Suðuroy, typically for educational purposes. Furthermore, many reported that their move back to Suðuroy was prompted by either him or her having obtained a job. Therefore, the return to Suðuroy was generally associated with having employment. However, our informants were clear that employment opportunities are limited on the island, and a career is something that is associated with the central labour market in Tórshavn.

There was also evidence of adjusting employment decisions due to limited opportunities on Suðuroy. We saw evidence of informants who had failed to gain employment, despite having specialised university degrees or qualifications. Yet, several had found resourceful ways of creating their own jobs, and partially or wholly making use of their degrees and qualifications. In a few cases, our informants had started their own businesses, for instance one has a web-based business, combined with offering tourism services, and another has combined catering, tourism and creative arts.

Yet another highly qualified informant had set up his own business, based in Suðuroy. Although this informant and his family moved to Denmark for educational purposes, their intention was always to return. Therefore, a career plan was necessary to secure work in Suðuroy and enable the family to return to the island. Prior to moving to the Faroe Islands, our informant originally worked in a highly specialized niche sector in Denmark. However, he decided to take up other employment whilst still in Denmark, in which he would gain competencies and experience in a more generalised area within his field. This, our informant presumed, would improve his opportunities for finding work in Suðuroy, in which broad-based, rather than niche, competencies



are in demand.

Another feature of the labour market in Suðuroy is the lengthy time that some individuals work as reliefs, holding either temporary contracts or being called-on upon demand, e.g. if permanent staff are sick. Working as a relief is a feature especially in the public sector (pedagogues, nursing assistants, teachers for instance), also evident elsewhere in the Faroe Islands. However, the length of time with such precarious labour market contact appears to be more prevalent and lengthier in Suðuroy, at least in some sectors. Having worked long enough as a relief; waiting for a permanent position to become vacant, appeared to afford a sense of entitlement to employment. In other words, some were in effect waiting in an employment queue, which may conflict with public sector recruitment criteria of awarding positions to the most qualified. The collective acknowledgement of difficulties in securing permanent positions in some professions, however, leads to a sense of acceptance of such practices. Furthermore, in view of a declining population, some informants highlighted the importance of jobs being awarded to people who are committed to Suðuroy. Commitment in this sense means those who reside in the community and feel a sense of belonging, rather than those who commute to work in Suðuroy from elsewhere.

The recognition that permanent employment in some sectors is hard to come by, was highlighted by one of our informants, who has permanent employment in Suðuroy. For family reasons this informant moved to Tórshavn for a few years but retained his job and commuted to Suðuroy. As such, he deemed it necessary to "hold onto" his position with a view to returning to the island.

Due to its limited size, many functions on Suðuroy do not amount to full-time positions. Therefore, some of our informants hold several jobs, sometimes out of necessity, other times as an income supplement. Throughout our data collection, the limited employment opportunities in Suðuroy were articulated on several occasions. However, the issue of limited opportunities is mostly related to finding suitable employment, rather than finding an(y) actual job. Our informants clearly indicated that presently, there are enough jobs available, albeit not the right positions for educated people. Furthermore, there was a consensus that the most significant labour market adjustment people in Suðuroy make is the acceptance that career mobilities are highly limited. The woman in the first quote below, and the couple in the latter are all originally from Suðuroy. Having moved away whilst young and gained an education within public sector professions, they later returned to work in the public sector.

I know some [Faroese] have moved from Denmark because they have got employment [in Suðuroy]. Maybe one person in a couple might get their dream job which fits, but the other person must then go between several jobs so that ends can meet. It is seldom, I reckon, that both get their real dream jobs here.

Hans: "Well you could say that we have, instead of aiming for a mega exciting career and attempted to climb the career ladder, and I might have become a manager in Tórshavn and a cool management job...aiming for that, taking courses and building up to that. Instead, we as a family have consciously chosen something else, completely consciously, and you know some nurses...you know that if you work in Tórshavn, then you can progress to teaching at the nursing college, and get a management job and things like that. But we have consciously decided: No! We want something else. [Turns to wife] Do you think that is overstating it?". Sanna: "No, but we have been satisfied with it [our decision]". Hans: "Well 100 [%]."

As the quotes above highlight, our informants know that moving to Suðuroy may involve adjusting career expectations and are conscious of the limitations of being in

a geographically isolated labour market. Generally, our informants find value and meaning in professional life and many hold employment corresponding to educational qualifications, especially those in the public sector. However, our informants are also aware that professional development and professional forums are highly limited in Suðuroy.

#### 5.2.1.3 Flexible hours

Generally, flexibility in work life for many women is gained from working part-time, especially prevalent in the public sector. That way they can attend to family business and decide themselves if they want to take on extra shifts. For those that do not work part-time, there are fewer opportunities for flexibility, at least on paper. Yet, the people of Suðuroy speak of time as being less structured, and life on the island is generally less controlled by the clock. The main exception to this is the ferry timetable, which strongly controls life on the island, at least for those who need to travel.



**Smyril which sails between Suðuroy and Tórshavn (With permission from Suðurrás)**

Many people in Suðuroy regularly leave the island, for instance to visit the main hospital for specialist appointments, for children's orthodontist appointments, for meetings etc. As such, there is a common understanding in Suðuroy that mobility is necessary, and trips to Tórshavn typically involve being away for a whole day, from 6am till evening. Informants reported some employers being flexible in such cases, while others stated that employers do not adequately allow for the reality that time must be spent off the island every now and then. In some cases, our informants take annual leave to cover such trips, while those paid by the hour and the self-employed lose income.

### 5.2.2 Family life and gender roles

The Faroe Islands is a family-oriented society, where people identify with, and are recognised as belonging to family networks (Gaini, 2013). At the core of family life are children, whose wellbeing is closely linked to the cultural norms of a work-family balance. With the intention of maintaining a family-focused work-life, women commonly modify their labour market participation. Consequently, a large portion of Faroese women work reduced hours. This is not least the case in families where men are long-distance workers (Hayfield et al., 2016).

In Suðuroy, we found that the gendered characteristics of the labour market are somewhat similar to the rest of the Faroe Islands on several counts; especially with respect to working hours and gender occupational segregation. This is especially evident in industries where many men practice long-distance work patterns. The people of Suðuroy frequently contrast the labour market on Suðuroy with that of Tórshavn. Their perception of career orientation and the costs of living in Tórshavn impacts on their feelings about work and the gender division of labour, as the couple below are discussing.

Pól: "It is a bit different. I don't know if one can say that in Tórshavn, I reckon that in most cases both [men and women] work, both contribute at home and things like that...it is maybe because, in a town, housing is maybe more expensive and both need to work. I think that in villages, it is maybe more the case that it is not always both in a couple who work...". Sunnivá: "Well maybe not full-time." Pól: "Maybe you don't need to."

As in the extract above, we found many references to lower housing costs in Suðuroy as incentives (among others) to live in Suðuroy, and the financial space to reduce working hours. The difference in house prices in Suðuroy is evident when contrasting the actual sales figures in the two locations: For 2019, house prices in Tórshavn<sup>4</sup> were five times higher than in Suðuroy. Corresponding figures for the remaining locations of the Faroe Islands indicate that house prices are on average more than double compared to those in Suðuroy (Skyn, personal communication, 2020). Therefore, not only is Tórshavn a much more expensive place to live in terms of accommodation, but so too are many other areas throughout the Faroes Islands.

Our informants explained that a reduced financial burden provides freedom to work less, focus more on family life and other pursuits they value. We saw much evidence that in such cases, it is primarily women who reduce their working hours, especially for those with long-distance working partners. Our informants value the freedom, which comes with lower housing costs, providing them also with more family time and less stress. One woman explained:

Here there are actually quite good opportunities to create a future. The house prices are quite low, so you chose to spend...well take for instance Torshavn, the prices there cost millions. Then you chose to work the rest of your life for that. My friend has just bought a house [here in Suðuroy] for 500,000. A lovely house, newly renovated, you know, then you have a different kind of economic freedom.

When discussing the division of care and housework at home, our informants had varying understandings of gender roles in Suðuroy. A majority of our informants referred to Suðuroy as being traditional in terms of gender practices. They pointed out, however, that gender arrangements have changed over the years, and referred

---

4. According to real estate agent Skyn, 2019 is a representative year, with respect to relative house prices in different locations in the Faroe Islands.



especially to fathers being more involved at home nowadays. One man in his 70s spoke of a vast change in gender arrangements: "It is completely different...I notice it in my own children. I think men today are more involved at home than what I was. There is no discussion about that, it is 100% sure". Many we spoke to, reported the division of care and housework within their own family unit to be fairly equal, and in most families, men were involved in caring for children. One father stated that: "I want to be a father with a capital F" and expressed a dedication to be actively involved with his children's upbringing. Notwithstanding generational changes, our informants maintained that although gender arrangements are various throughout Suðuroy, a traditional gender division of labour is still widespread.

In the essays and focus group interviews with young people, the anticipation of future employment bore much similarity with current gender roles. Several boys aspire to be fishermen, electricians offshore or in manual trades and girls to be doctors, psychologists, artists, and hairdressers. Some of the youngsters also referred to women as more likely to be at home taking care of children. Therefore, it would appear that the young people, at least at this age, do not envisage alternative gender roles in future.



**Ram**

As with the Faroe Islands in general, paid and unpaid work is gendered in Suðuroy. One area in which the gendered division of labour is highly salient, is in the practice of sheep rearing. Sheep rearing, as well as the rearing of domestic geese are highly valued practices in Suðuroy (as it is in many other settings in the Faroe Islands) and form part of pluriactivity (de Vries 1993). Furthermore, some men in Suðuroy take part in local and national ram competitions, to find the best ram. Sheep rearing is overwhelmingly a masculine part-time pursuit, although women are heavily involved

in shearing and food preparation. For some of our couples, with one long-distance worker, women become more involved in sheep rearing during a husband's absence. Notwithstanding such cases, few women, and occasionally young girls, partake in the mountain climb to drive sheep into the fold or to slaughter the sheep. In this vein, Joensen (Joensen, 1999) has argued that, when women step-in and assist with sheep rearing, it is with a lesser commitment as sheep rearing is overwhelmingly a masculine space with a sharp gender division of labour. In explaining gender roles in Suðuroy, one of our male informants explained that:

The male culture here is very different to that in Tórshavn. The male culture here, it is sheep and football and stuff like that, they are big issues, and then there is fishing and the likes. And well, in Tórshavn, they never speak about sheep, I don't think many I know in Tórshavn have sheep...well a few have. Football, well, that is important, too, in Tórshavn, but men, they discuss other things as well. The male culture that is here, you could say it is very...it is farming-based, without that being negative. I think it is fantastic.

In a non-urban setting like Suðuroy, where the fishing industry dominates and sheep rearing is valued as a source of food production and cultural practice, gender becomes salient in nature-based activities. This was evident in our data, in which fathering practices involved showing boys the ropes of sheep rearing, although girls were welcome, too. Despite women holding paid work and sharing domestic responsibilities, the domains of home and nature have strong gender connotations. In other words, the sea and mountains are masculinised spaces; and hunting and fishing are male activities. This gendering of nature spaces is a feature of geographically isolated areas also found in settings elsewhere (e.g. Bye, 2003; Little, 2002; O'Reilly et al., 2009).

Interestingly, one teacher we interviewed told us that sheep rearing used to be considered old fashioned amongst young people, and something which they wished to disassociate with. They were, he said, "embarrassed in case others would find out that they had been helping out with the sheep". These days, it has become increasingly popular to be involved in sheep rearing. In the interviews with youngsters and in their essays, several of the boys and some girls, paid reference to enjoying what they call "bóndalív", or farm life. Despite farming activities being a pursuit on the side line for most people, in addition to their primary income, as part of pluriactivity, it is evidently a highly valued aspect of life in Suðuroy. When we asked young people how life in Suðuroy was different to that in Tórshavn, most summed this up by paying reference to Suðuroy representing "bygdalív" (village-life). When probed, this was explained through images of sheep rearing, quietness, "not much happening", nature, freedom and a lack of privacy, which the youngsters found stifling.

For all our informants, young and old, nature figures as a space representing various forms of freedoms: As vast beautiful spaces to access, as sites of sheep rearing, as constant reminders of being close to nature providing what one informant called "beinpláss" (leg-room), which they contrast with the dense living of urbanity. Notwithstanding the collective appreciation of close relations with nature, we encountered the practices associated with consuming nature, most evidently sheep rearing practices, as profoundly gendered.

### 5.2.3 Belonging

Overwhelmingly, our informants have their roots in Suðuroy. 80% of our adult

informants were brought up in Suðuroy. The remaining 20% either have family roots on the island or else have a spouse/partner from Suðuroy. Whilst most of our informants have at some point lived elsewhere, either in the Faroe Islands or overseas, they have moved back to Suðuroy. For some, the intention was always to return, while others made the decision later. Some longed to return, especially after having had children, and spoke of wanting to return to the tight family networks. However, suitable employment is not necessarily easy to come by, therefore, for most of our informants, the factor which triggered the move to Suðuroy was when at least one household member gained employment.

When speaking of incomers (those that are not considered to be from Suðuroy), our informants believe that most come due to their connections through a spouse/partner from Suðuroy. This means that few people come to live on the island without a history connected to Suðuroy, in the form of memories, relations or experiences. In this sense, autobiography is an important element contributing to belonging. Our respondents remember their own childhoods and spoke of Suðuroy as a child-friendly place, not least due to the vast natural spaces, close personal relations and children's freedom of spatial movement. They spoke of wanting their children to experience the same childhood, and in this sense that means passing-on an upbringing in Suðuroy as a gift of place to their children (Bennett, 2014).

Children in the Faroe Islands, especially those in non-urban areas of the Faroe Islands, have been found to enjoy freedom of mobility (Schug, 2016). This may in part be attributed to low crimes rates, a collective surveillance of children (Hayfield, 2018) and what Gaini (Gaini, 2012) refers to as a style of parenting with few boundaries, allowing children freedom to explore the environment around them. Our young informants agree that Suðuroy is a good place for children to live, although they feel that there is not enough to offer young people in terms of opportunities. The following extracts from youth and adult informants indicate how place belongingness is connected to freedom, space, and nature, especially associated with childhood.

In Suðuroy the conditions are good for children to grow up. There is not much traffic, so you can safely let your child go out to play. This also means that children become more sociable. The conditions for children to be out, summer and winter are very good. During the summer you can e.g. take your fishing net and bucket to a burn or lake and catch trout or small fish.

Essay by youngster in lower secondary school, 9th grade.

Growing up in Suðuroy has been fantastic. I could not wish for a better childhood. As it is not a city, children enjoy much more freedom to play outside. For instance, my upbringing has been full of inspiration and joy, and I remember that me and one of my friends played dolls in a burn and we built a dolls house from snow.

Essay by youngster in lower secondary school, 9th grade.



**View from the mountain (Photo by  
Tóra Effersøe Mortensen)**

It was fantastic [to grow up here] ... it was completely free. Well there was nothing, you just went from house to house and this, you know ... you had everything, there was the mountain up here and the stream, the outfield and, yes I was everywhere. It was all one big playground ... well it still is.

Man in his 30s.

Another key factor of place-belongingness is the close family and social networks in Suðuroy, which create a sense of intimacy, of interconnectedness and of interdependency, a pattern of social networks evident in the Faroe Islands generally (Hayfield & Schug, 2019). Several of our informants spoke of dense networks as creating a strong sense of belonging. Furthermore, family networks, in the form of siblings, grandparents etc. are important resources to help with childcare, not least to enable parents to straddle work and home responsibilities. For our informants, the familiarity of knowing who everyone is, is a source of comfort, of safety and of feeling safe. For those not originally from Suðuroy, the importance of being able to access social networks is crucial to belong in Suðuroy, as the following quote from a woman in her 30s highlights.

Well it sounds a little dramatic ... one does not quite lose friends and family, but when you move to Suðuroy, well ... it entails that those in the north [of Suðuroy] find it very difficult to come to Suðuroy, because it is so far. So the ordinary stuff like going to a friend for coffee or the knitting clubs...I have been lucky to become part of a family-in-law, where the network has been super good. I doubt whether I had moved to Suðuroy if the network was not this good. I have nothing bad to say about Suðuroy, but as a family with children, you need a network.

Social surveillance is a feature of life in Suðuroy and comes with the intimacy of small places. Our adult informants spoke of ignoring gossip, and having grown up under such conditions, social control is a reality they are accustomed to. However, for our young informants, it is highly frustrating. Being adolescents and struggling to gain more independence, it is difficult to escape the collective surveillance, which provides spatial freedom at a younger age. Therefore, despite feeling strongly connected to place, young people experience another, less positive, side to close

relations in small places, and Suðuroy for them becomes confining - a feature often associated with small places (Bjarnason and Thorlindsson, 2006). Many youngsters spoke of boredom and not having enough designated spaces, such as youth clubs. As a form of spatial struggle with adults, they referred to adults watching their every move and keeping parents informed of their every move, as is evident in the extract below, from a youth group interview.

Interviewer: "Yes, you have written 'quiet and you know everyone'". Girl and boy collectively: "Yes". Interviewer: "Is it good or is it bad or is it ...". Some boys collectively: "It is both good and bad". Hansina: "In-between". Marna: "Because ehm ... gossip". Ann: "Yes gossip. Because if you are walking outside and maybe do something that isn't quite [some giggling] normal. I don't know, then everyone will talk about it. The parents and stuff [participants laugh]". Heri: "I fell off my moped. I had hardly got up again before the whole village knew. All of Tórsvík knew". Interviewer: "Really? Heri: "I had not said anything to anyone and then while I lay there and got x-rayed [at the hospital], a friend rang: 'I hear you have fallen'".

Having a distinctive local Suðuroy dialect, provides a shared sense of identity for people in Suðuroy and is a factor in place-belongingness. In this sense, people in Suðuroy define themselves in relation to the rest of the Faroe Islands as being different in character and dialect. Our informants spoke of loving the dialect of Suðuroy, which prompts comments elsewhere in the Faroe Islands. Some of the youngsters, however, felt that people "in the north" make fun of the dialect and look down on people from Suðuroy. The importance of language in place-belongingness was most significant for two of our immigrant informants, whose first language is non-Nordic (one adult and one youngster). They described having difficulty fitting in, because of language barriers. The immigrant adult we spoke to, who communicates in English, spoke of his frustration as local villagers were hesitant to speak to him. Consequently, cultural and language connections are factors which can prevent people from feeling they belong in place.

Overall, our findings suggest that our informants' sense of place-belongingness is complex when considering material, financial, relational, autobiographical and cultural factors. Yet, the difference between our adult and youth informants was clear. The young people feel a strong sense of belonging to Suðuroy, but at this stage in life, it does not necessarily equate to anticipating a return to the island post-higher education. As such, our findings clearly suggest that many youngsters anticipate leaving the island at some point, either for educational or work purposes, consistent with a culture of migration (Corbett, 2007; Hayfield, 2017). Many indicate a willingness or a desire to live in Suðuroy, however, they are aware that other factors, employment for instance, may dictate where they reside in future. Our adult informants, on the other hand, have made the decision to come back, most of them consciously seeking the type of non-urban, family friendly life, which Suðuroy is perceived to offer.

#### **5.2.4 Attitudes to change and innovation**

Despite being distributed across different villages and towns in Suðuroy, the people of Suðuroy are united in feeling concern for the future of the island. This is especially evident in their mentioning of population decline. Our adult informants spoke with hope about pregnancies on the island, and people are generally very well informed about forthcoming births. Young people have a dual perspective in which they both are positive concerning the island's future, but at the same time paint a somewhat bleak picture of out-migration and future job opportunities. The primary concern of



all informants, regardless of age, is that high levels of educational attainment is a primary factor preventing in-migration to Suðuroy.



**Upper secondary school in Suðuroy**

Yet the bleak outlook on Suðuroy is complex. Despite concerns of demographics, people are generally positive about their lives on the island. However, the picture portrayed in the Faroese press, our informants feel, has a negative slant on Suðuroy. From their perspective, media reporting has focused excessively on internal disputes within one municipality, as well as demographic and labour market challenges. Therefore, they are concerned that people in the north of the Faroe Islands are presented with a singular media image of Suðuroy as an island in decline. This in turn affects the self-image within Suðuroy.

Historically, Suðuroy was a major industrial centre of the Faroe Islands, and fishing was at the centre of industrial activity. As a result, island identity is strongly tied to the fishing and maritime industries. Whilst still highly significant, these days relative employment numbers in the fishing industry have vastly declined (Economic Council of the Faroe Islands, 2015, p. 22) due to efficiencies and industry restructuring. The historical knowledge and practice of the fishing industry in Suðuroy entails that it is challenging for people in Suðuroy to focus on or obtain funding for new industry ventures not associated with the fishing industry. Furthermore, as people on Suðuroy are less able to commute, this is amplified by pressures of job creation and population decline. Our informant in the quote below points out that Suðuroy needs to focus on other industries than the fishing industry, in which jobs are gradually disappearing.

Dennis [Mayor of Vágur in Suðuroy] ... has come with his education and has looked at graphs. And then he has come to some other conclusions, whilst many others, they are so set upon thoughts about fish. And what is difficult, is that many people here actually earn a lot of money, well fishermen and the likes, but we can almost not get investors to invest in Suðuroy unless it is about fish ... And what is notable about the fishing industry here in the Faroe Islands, is that it is not a job-creator, it winds-up jobs ... because over the past 20 years, half of all the jobs in the fishing industry, both at sea and on land, have disappeared and that will not stop.

The extract above exemplifies the sentiment we found in Suðuroy that a lack of

willingness to invest in new ventures, other than the fishing industry, is a structural challenge preventing new industries getting wind to grow. Our informants reported that many people are open to change, but some are highly resistant and conservative in terms of new ideas for business. Some spoke of people in Suðuroy having an open attitude to that which is different, e.g. the opening of cafés, tourism initiatives, as well as different sexualities. However, we also identified a gendered resistance towards women who work long hours or who sell products and services not traditionally associated with women, computer software for instance. Some of our informants also pointed out that a lack of diversity in start-ups may partly be attributed to the lack of official initiatives to support entrepreneurship.



**Indoor football arena**

People in Suðuroy are starting to see opportunities in tourism, and several of our informants spoke of tourism with hope. However, the ventures of the Mayor of Vágur in Suðuroy have received mixed reviews. The Mayor has led the way to establish an international sports and adventure folk high school, to build the first Olympic sized swimming pool, as well as the first indoor football arena in the Faroe Islands. The municipal strategy is to create employment and business opportunities outside the fishing industry. Our interviews highlighted that people in Suðuroy do not necessarily welcome the new ventures of the Mayor of Vágur, some describing it as a waste of public money. Others, however, are highly positive, seeing it as an important move towards new sources of income.

### **5.2.5 Commuting and mobility**

One of the defining features of life in Suðuroy, is the need to be mobile. The islanders of Suðuroy travel for work, for medical and health purposes, to participate in sport tournaments, to acquire supplies not available otherwise, for leisure and family occasions, and some young people reported spending time in Tórshavn to shop and participate in youth culture. The ferry journey between Tvøroyri (Suðuroy) and Tórshavn, the capital, takes two hours each way. Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and

Monday, the ferry has three daily departures from Suðuroy, and the remaining days, two departures.

The people of Suðuroy are highly accustomed to travelling to and from Suðuroy. Whilst it does present challenges, our informants refer to the ferry journey as all they have ever known. This means that growing up in Suðuroy involves practices of mobility necessities. Yet, travelling to and from Suðuroy is for many imbued with frustration, stemming from limited departures as well as ferry irregularities, cancellations and technical faults.

Over the past decades, the Faroe Islands have become highly centralised and urbanised. As a result, the people of Suðuroy feel increasingly geographically isolated. At the same time, other parts of the Faroe Islands are well connected through roads, tunnels, and subsea tunnels. Therefore, the structural dimensions of mobility have left the people of Suðuroy with less mobility capital and an imperative to orient themselves more towards the centre (Cresswell, 2010; Farrugia, 2016).

For most of our informants, especially adults, the feeling of stepping onto an island, when coming off the ferry, gives them a sense of peace and reduced stress compared to being in Tórshavn. The pace of life in Suðuroy provides them with a sense of freedom. Conversely, being controlled by a ferry timetable is a stressful factor. With limited departures, those travelling to and from the island must make the ferry on time. In the event of cancellations, people are stranded, unable to execute their business or return home. This contradiction in feeling free and unfree at the same time is highlighted in the quotes below.

Katrina: "If we are going somewhere, then you know it is Smyril [ferry]. Elsewhere, well almost all the other islands, are connected by road. At least the larger areas are." Martin: "Yes." Katrina: "They get into the car and they can just drive, wherever they are going. And back home when they are finished. We need to watch the clock and run around being time slaves and all that. But that is all we know." Martin: "You are brought up with it." Couple in their 30s.

But I don't know if you can measure stress level, but you experience, well you maybe have a feeling that when you come off the Smyril, at Tvøroyri, onto Suðuroy, then the stress level is lower than in the north. And there is, it is probably ... well I have heard several say it ... because when you are on an island, then it is the feeling of being on an island. Well, then you are here. You are surrounded by sea and yes, then you live here.

Man in his 60s.

Infrequent departures and the two-hour journey each way (plus travel to and from the ferry) means a short meeting or consultation with a specialist in Tórshavn, will typically require sailing at 6am and returning no sooner than 12 twelve hours later. Sailing between Suðuroy and the capital is government subsidised and relatively inexpensive. Furthermore, there is a partial reimbursement scheme for those who commute far to work. In this sense, people enjoy social access to mobility options. However, few departures, irregularities, and the long journey amount to a restriction of mobility options. This in turn leaves people in Suðuroy in a weaker position, compared to many others in the Faroe Islands. As such they have a reduced capacity for mobility (Kaufmann et al., 2004).

Some of our self-employed informants, tendering for work outside Suðuroy, have found they are unable to compete on price, due to the cost of travelling time. One of our informants also advised us that living in Suðuroy can be a disadvantage, when applying for jobs in Tórshavn. In his experience, would-be employers have pointed out



that residing in Suðuroy is an obstacle to a job offer. Some Suðuroy-based builders carry out work in the central area, and we encountered trades workers who hold a second residence in Tórshavn during the week. That way they avoid a daily commute, which for most is untenable. Such second residences might be e.g. sharing a flat with others from Suðuroy, living in barracks, caravans or with relatives. Therefore, it is evident that people in Suðuroy adapt to restricted mobility options.

Presently, the fourth Faroese subsea tunnel is being constructed between Tórshavn and the island of Sandoy. Upon its completion, 89% of Faroe Islanders will be connected by road, tunnels, and subsea tunnels. This leaves 11% of the population, of which 9% live on Suðuroy. The remaining two percent ( $89\% + 9\% + 2\% = 100\%$ ) live on very small islands. Therefore, this leaves Suðuroy isolated compared to the rest of the Faroe Islands. Recently, discussions have emerged, which could entail that a subsea tunnel to Suðuroy could be a reality in future, converting the two-hour ferry journey to Tórshavn to a one-hour drive.

In discussions of the future, some of our informants were sceptical of constructing a subsea tunnel, whilst others considered it a necessity. It was clear, though, that despite life, at least from time to time, being too defined and structured around the rhythm of Smyril, most experienced the ferry as a place where one can work, sleep or interact with others. They spoke of the social nature of being on the ferry and catching up with friends and acquaintances. Some also pointed out the difference between how "Havnafolk" (people from Tórshavn) navigate and use space on Smyril. In many respects, despite frustrations associated with the lengthy and an unstable ferry connection, the discourse surrounding the ferry was of Smyril as an extension of Suðuroy as place, which is highlighted in the three extracts below.

It is a lovely trip. Smyril is a great ship, when you use it often. Yes, and you sleep for a while and talk to people. And sit and knit for a while and things like that ... it is almost like being at home. You can almost say that those who travel a lot have their own seating on Smyril.

Woman in her 50s.

Pól: "I am satisfied [with the ferry connection] ... of course not everyone agrees with me. But I think it is satisfactory because it sails quite often, and I think it is a good service. There is space for more or less all cargo and stuff like that. Of course, occasionally some cars are left behind." Sunniva: "Also, you sit down and relax. It is not a hundred miles an hour the whole time. There you need to sit. And we notice it very well, especially with "havnafolk", who come aboard and are a little impatient. I just think: You are going nowhere for two hours [laughs]. I sometimes feel like saying that. Well, it all has to be here and now [for them]." Couple in their 50s.

Sólja: "If me and our friends go, we just sit and talk and play cards or something like that. It is fun. But if you are on your own, it is not fun, then you just lie there and watch a film or sleep." Janus: "I actually think that all those who travel on their own take a round-trip round the ship to see if they know someone ... It is the ugliest thing ever to be on board on your own and sit there...and then there's the internet which sucks, so you can't always use the phone. Then you just sit there and watch ... Then you look like a ... [Some others giggle] ... like you don't have anyone in the world."

Group interview with youngsters, lower secondary school, 9th grade.

It was clear from our interviews that the people of Suðuroy have mixed feelings about the potential of a tunnel, as inevitably "the feel" of Suðuroy will change. It will provide a much-improved mobility potential, as they will not be bound by a timetable or ferry irregularities. Significantly, a tunnel will implicate participation in the central

educational and labour market. Furthermore, the marketplace for local businesses will expand. Cresswell (2010) refers to the importance of considering "feelings" of mobilities and how mobility is actually experienced. Some of our informants or their children experienced seasickness regularly, entailing that the physical feeling of the rhythm of the ship and that of nausea is a significant deterrent for some to travel - at least in certain weather. One mother spoke of her son not partaking in football tournaments in poor weather. In this sense, feelings associated with mobility entails some have less mobility potential - and thus a highly embodied obstacle to practicing mobility.

### 5.2.6 Summary: Themes and trends Suðuroy

For many everyday undertakings, Suðuroy is a self-contained unit, in terms of schooling, sourcing goods and services as well as many welfare services. The population of 4,600 therefore, is sufficiently large to support a certain level of activity. However, working off the island is an important feature of maintaining an income for many families on the island. Long-distance working in fishing, offshore and maritime industries are significant enablers to live on Suðuroy. This means that for families with a long-distance worker, the benefit of securing a job for only one partner on the island provides opportunities to return to Suðuroy.

As with the rest of the Faroe Islands, there is a strong degree of occupational segregation on the labour market in Suðuroy. The public sector is a significant employer, and especially women work in welfare occupations such as nursing, pedagogy, teaching, social work and so on. The fishing industry is an important part of the industrial past of Suðuroy and still today, much employment is related to the fishing industry. In terms of occupational segregation, women in the fishing industry are concentrated on land, in fish processing, whilst men work on fishing vessels. In terms of seasonality, some sections of the fishing industry are seasonal, e.g. the pelagic sector (Mackerel).

Another seasonal industry is the emerging tourism on the island. Our informants spoke of tourism with hope for a growth sector on the island, not least due to the dwindling population. Although few - as yet - live exclusively off tourism, several of our informants are involved in tourism during the summer months and gain additional income. This combining of jobs we encountered on several occasions. However, for many, employment within the public sector, fishery, maritime, off-shore, and various manual trades, is sufficient in itself. Nevertheless, the securing of permanent employment, especially in the public sector, is recognised as difficult. Therefore, once in a permanent position, people are aware that such employment is hard to come by in some sectors.

People in Suðuroy point to the lack of employment for the highly qualified, and opportunities for advancement or climbing the career ladder are limited. However, many of our informants value the quality of life on Suðuroy, and prioritise a work-life balance over the pace of life in Tórshavn, which they perceive as stressful and unsatisfying. This is not least the case in terms of house prices in the capital, which are on average five times higher compared to Suðuroy.

The economic freedom that comes with having lower mortgages enables people to work less. In most cases, this involves women working part-time to prioritise family life. Gender roles in Suðuroy have vastly changed over generations, and men are much more involved in fathering than previously. Despite gender arrangements

varying throughout Suðuroy, our informants perceive traditional gender roles and a gendered division of paid and unpaid work to be relatively widespread in Suðuroy.

The vast majority of our informants have their roots in Suðuroy, and have almost all lived elsewhere for educational or work purposes yet have chosen to return to the island. Our informants highly value the vast nature spaces in Suðuroy, freedom and safe environment, which young people, too, consider as one of the best aspects of growing up in Suðuroy.

A fundamental characteristic of life on Suðuroy is of being dependent on the ferry. People are mobile and many travel relatively frequently the four-hour return journey to Tórshavn for work, errands, meetings, social gatherings, and health-related appointments. Our informants have an ambivalent relation to the ferry. On the one hand, they are highly frustrated at the few departures, mechanical failures, and cancellations due to weather. Furthermore, being controlled by a ferry timetable presents them with restrictions on participation in events of all sorts. On the other hand, the ferry is for some almost an extension of the island in which people catch up with others and are sociable during the journey.

### 5.3 Themes and trends in Narsaq

The themes from our Greenlandic location in Narsaq are marked by the fact that Narsaq is not an island. On an island, one will typically find some interconnectedness between living in smaller locations reachable by road or by foot. Narsaq is in this sense one community located in a town at the foot of the Qaqqarsuaq mountain. This impacts the outlook, because you look to the sea. Looking for fish or seal and looking for incoming tourists and boats with sheep for the slaughterhouse. Narsaq also receives sheep when the slaughtering season comes. The community and the interviews should, therefore, be viewed in that context, and the season when they were recorded. Our fieldwork was conducted in the middle of the off-season, in February. In Narsaq we mainly interviewed women in entrepreneurial positions. We were looking for them to both elaborate on daily life and let us know about perhaps future business ideas for the community.

#### 5.3.1 Flexible work lives

When it comes to the labour market and the working week, Greenland is not so flexible. Greenland has a 40-hour work-week in which the working day is spread over the traditional eight hours. This is mainly because the public sector is the largest employer, as 45 percent of the workforce work in the public sector (Statistics Greenland, 2018). The Greenlandic, together with the Faroese location, are by this trend the countries within the Realm of Denmark with the longest official workweek. This has also become Greenlandic work culture when working in the private sector, in the public sector or within former government owned or semi-government owned businesses.

The focus of this study has been on the labour market in the geographically isolated areas of Greenlandic society. When exploring the qualitative data, it is possible to identify different perspectives on the traditional 40-hour workweek, however, it is rare to encounter. There are accounts from people who desire (or need) seasonal jobs, as well as those who would rather have flexible working hours with a steady

employer. The norm is 40 hours. This is what students are told to prepare for, and everyone complies with this. It is rare to encounter a discussion around a reduction of the work week to e.g. the Danish 37-hour week. A recent suggestion of a reduction in work hours from 40 to 35 hours yielded very little public response (Veirum, 2020). In combination with the current low employment rates, the compliant attitude towards the 40-hour work week might have yielded some reluctance to introduce more flexible solutions. Over the past five years, the level of unemployment country-wide has decreased from 4,000 jobseekers to 2,500 jobseekers in total numbers (Grønlands Statistik, 2020). When gleaning at the local job application sites there are zero advertisements for part-time positions.

In general, we were looking at flexibility in the work lives of our interviewees, to get a better understanding of what we presumed to be a need to engage in different work sectors at different times of the working week or throughout the year. We ended up encountering signs of seasonal work, but not really flexibility.

#### 5.3.1.1 Seasonal work

Narsaq is a town in an Arctic climate, a farming centre and surrounded by breathtaking landscapes, and from what we hear, has the best blueberries in the region. It is also a town clearly marked by seasonal changes. These are changes in commercial business opportunities and in the same way, these are changes that are strongly embedded in the culture of the community of Narsaq. Back in historical times, farming was a heavy marker of the entire South Greenland. It still is to this day. However, a new marker is that of tourism, which in several ways is still in its emergent phase. Greenland is investing in tuning the workforce towards a more entrepreneurial focus on tourism, however, this is still a work in progress so to say – although an increase in the number of tour-operators is evident over the last decade. We were expecting to hear about the tough balance of different seasonal work, but this was less than expected. There was, however, some talk about seasonal work. One store owner said: "We have a personal calendar. The tourist season starts with tourists from Spain. Then the season is on. Then there is a shepherd's party every second year. September is the butchering of the sheep. So, this is evident."

The town has many unemployed people, so when there are job vacancies for as little as ten people, it is something that gets noticed. It creates a different positive atmosphere in the town. The small change of just ten extra people in employment is noticeable in the community. At the local slaughterhouse, the superintendent said:

We are looking for seasonal workers. It isn't very easy to attract people from outside of Narsaq. The ones who are employed the longest, are those that settle and live in the town. At the slaughterhouse during the slaughtering season, we have 100 employees. Eighty of them are what we call stable. The rest of the year, we have around 30 personnel.

They see an increase of over three times the average number of employees. That is a tripling of the employment level of paid workers, of people with colleagues, break room banter and new social contacts. It must seem like a series of small mini-societies that are created and re-created with positive ripple effects every time the slaughterhouse triple the number of employees.

At the town's catering school, we get a very clear understanding of the range of potentialities that could help Narsaq further in the tourism sector. One staffer

relayed: "The hotel is not functioning well; we need people to be more service minded in order for the hotel to work correctly. This is a UNESCO heritage site, and we could utilize that way more."

Coming back to the reflections at the beginning of this section, we see a direct appeal for the town to be generally more orientated towards the tourism industry. It is a very justifiable wish, but a wish that would need a labour market in the community which is adjusted to people working in different sectors depending on the seasons. At our stay at the hotel, we made a series of observations which we took to be a little ironic. One example during our stay was that during evening dinner time, we were seated with a direct view of the slaughterhouse, Neqi A/S, and the harbour. However, there was no lamb on the menu and no fish either. Instead, we were given the choice of imported beef steak or burgers made with polish minced meat. Elsewhere in Greenland, there is frozen lamp from Neqi A/S available year-round in the freezers. This could be future examples of making the economy in the town more circular, thus reducing the import of outlandish meat, supporting the local economy, and quite possibly catering to the requirements of the hotel's guests.

Flexibility is not necessarily seen as problematic. Sennett has written that modern capitalism would eventually corrode the very fabric of being, almost like the Marxist's story of alienation (Sennett 1998). During an interview with a store manager from one of the local clothing stores, she told us of how the store contracted youngsters by giving them the opportunity to work "a little" before eventually sending them off to upper secondary schooling. This allowed for the youngsters to test out the inner workings of the retail business before going off to school. The store manager elaborated: "We have a lot of young students that come around looking for jobs. You get many benefits here, discounts and such, and that attracts a lot of young girls. We have a long waiting list of girls who want to try and work here."

The manager goes on to reply that after they finish school, the girls leave for Qaqortoq, which is the region's educational hub. It is a temporary opportunity for gaining experience, and the store manager looks at this as more than small side jobs. She takes pride in teaching the girls some responsibility in relation to the job market before "shipping" them off to further education in Qaqortoq.

In the local day-care centre we ended up discussing the clear effects of a positive holiday spirit. To the staff, in the day-care, it was noticeable how summertime is a time of joy and "prosperity/work": "Summertime is happy times. People return home for the holidays. For a short period of time - the tourists arrive primarily from Spain. The rest of the year is tranquil." When we were conducting fieldwork in February, Narsaq was more than quiet. During the daytime, the number of cars that passed us by, could be counted on one hand. As a visitor, you quickly sensed the tranquillity.

In Narsaq, they used to have a local shrimp processing factory. It was highly seasonal dependent and eventually closed, now there are two people employed there. One of the few local entrepreneurs told us about a significant shift in the season. She was concerned when thinking about the local hunters:

During winter, there isn't much hunting going on. I don't know how they survive; they don't get any help from the local municipality. The laws need to change in that aspect. During the summer, I'm pleased that the hunters can hunt, and I have people helping me to pick herbs in the countryside. There are certain people whom I have employed for the last two years.

Seasonal jobs are often defined by periods of high work intensity and periods of low work intensity. This involves job seekers in a process where they need to consider what to do, in whichever season is low season for them. For Narsaq, the season of high work intensity is the summer, and then a short period where the lambs are sent to be slaughtered. The rest of the year, Narsaq is almost dormant. In the offseason, which might span as long as from October until May, many people are unemployed. The rest of the year, the town is quiet. We see more boarded windows. Most of the uneducated workforce is unemployed. Some shovel snow and keep the roads clean, but there is not much to do.

#### 5.3.1.2 Changing jobs

The theme "Changing jobs" relates to a somewhat changing labour market situation in Narsaq. The theme also relates to the relocation, perhaps from one end of the country to another, in pursuit of new opportunities, which was evident in some of the interviews below. In some sectors, such as food services, health services, and social services, there is steady employment all year round. Some of the people interviewed are of the understanding that there are plenty of available jobs in Narsaq all year round. One local store manager does not have an educational background in business. Her education is in childcare: "I have been working here at the store for 17 years. I'm here at 7:30 every morning and leave at 17:30. Some days I go home early. It is my choice; it isn't my store. I'm employed here as the manager."

At the local slaughterhouse, the office manager initially moved to Narsaq together with her spouse ten years ago. She was determined to seek work at the local grocery store, because she had been working in that company for the last eight years. Nevertheless, she sought other education and studied administration, and is now employed in the butchery's administration. She believes that there is plenty of work available in Narsaq. At the local nursing home, at the butchery. There are jobs available, but it is challenging to fill the positions. When it comes to the more qualified job sector, she has her doubts and says: "Where are the educated young people supposed to seek jobs in Narsaq? All those jobs are now in Qaqortoq."

There are no grounds to conclude that there is a lot of job change among most of the women we have been talking to in middle management positions and leadership positions. Most of the women's careers seem to have been pretty straight forward in seeking further challenges within their sector, and rising from ground floor work to management, or even moving from Nuuk, the capital, in order to get a leadership position in the Narsaq.

#### 5.3.1.3 Flexible hours

Having a flexible work-life in Greenland is a positive thing. It provides opportunities to choose when and sometimes how to work. This is closely linked to the romantic liberty of the fishing and hunting community, where people sail or ride (dog sledge) to gather supplies when needed. That idea of freedom lingers throughout the

interviews, and is understood as a positive thing in relation to deciding for oneself when to work and when to be more flexible. Flexibility and the more easy-going work-life is also related to less specialised job-positions in the town, together with job opportunities in smaller businesses. Both of these professional settings hold a certain level of transparency in workload and the everyday demand for the completion of job-related assignments. Of course, when talking about flexibility, the reality is different from many industries, such as fishery, construction, and retail - sectors which require people to come in and work odd hours.

Flexible hours for the working women in Narsaq are not what you would expect. They do not divide their workday into different jobs or different employments. They seem to be working well above the average 40-hour workweek. Especially within the retail industry, interviewees report a norm of a 10-hour workday. In the small farming and design business, it is all work from sunrise until sundown, as evidence by the personal schedule of one of our interviewees:

5:00-7:00: She gets up, prepares the day, prepares breakfast and lunch, feeds the animals and does domestic work

9:00-12:00: Returns to the house, domestic work, and works on her design work and then back to the stables

12:00-16:00: Returns home for a break and handles administration around her design work

16:00-21:00: Feeding the animals, cooking, cleaning, practical chores in the stable before locking up and going home

22:00: Bedtime

In this schedule, there is no clear distinction between work and private life; what elsewhere has been called evaluating the work-life balance. We have other testimonies about working long hours, for example where a career in management was tried out: "It [the management position] touched upon my area of expertise. So I knew what I was getting in to. It was not right for me, the stress, so I chose to return to my current position. I missed that part of my old job." When the stress-level became unacceptable, the person re-evaluated her position and chose to return to her former employment. This is not a clear indicator of flexibility, but it gives insight into personal resources, which enables some people to re-think their job situation. It also tells about a certain flexibility, in this case for the employer, in letting the employee try the ropes of management, and subsequently letting them return to their former position within the organisation.

### **5.3.2 Family life and gender roles**

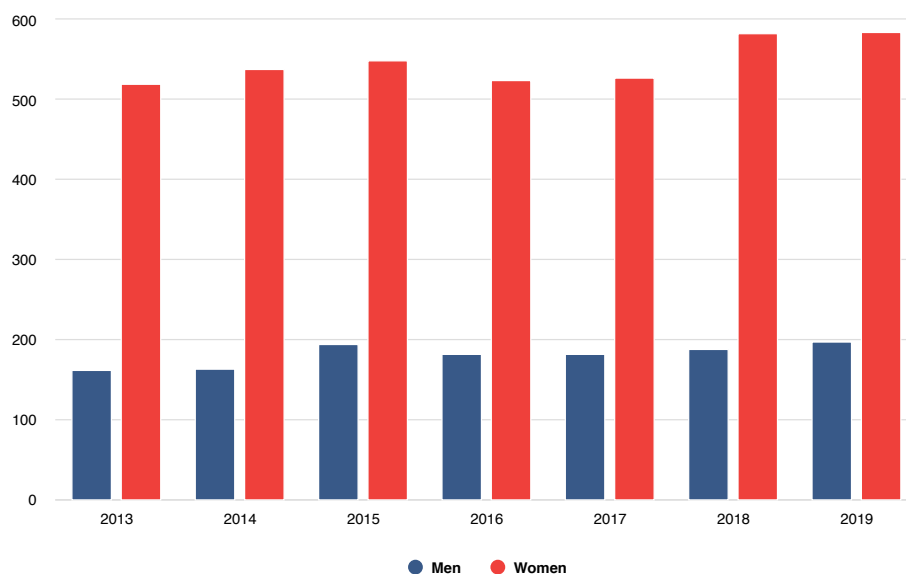
Not everyone in the Greenlandic study had something to say regarding family life. Those who did, emphasised that if you like your kids to be able to run around outside and play and the lovely nature, then yes, it is an excellent place to raise kids. Current discussions of balancing an increasingly fluid work life with family life, which are discussions we observe elsewhere in Greenland, did not come up (Gregory, 2016). The work-life balance could easily have been one of the parameters for moving away from larger towns to a place that is better suited for balancing the different spheres



of life. However, this was not a theme our informants discussed. When it came to family life, some expressed awareness that eventually, their kids will leave the town to seek further education. Nevertheless, one respondent told of how their daughter moved back to Narsaq to raise her kids in close relation to their grandparents.

We got the impression that the differences which we observed around gender roles in Narsaq were practical matters. The background analysis around this is somewhat complicated, Greenland has seen some feminist movement between 1960-1990 (Arnfjord & Christensen, 2017). However, since the 1990s, the debate has been more quiet on that front. Greenland does see wide gaps in income, and a high level of violence towards women and a rise in single-parent households, where it presumably is the woman/mother who is the caregiver. When that is said, the women who attended the workshop in Torshavn related that they do not experience a difference between men and women in jobs and the educational system. In the same statement, they convey that it is the women who run the household and look after the children.

Quite often, one finds more traditional gender roles away from the urban centres. Upon examining gender roles in relation to businesses, the private sector is by far still a male-dominated area of society. Changes in this area are expected in the future, not least as we are currently witnessing huge differences between the genders in terms of educational level in Greenland. The figure below shows how the number of women undertaking academic education is more than double that of men.



**Figure 13: Men & Women currently studying for a bachelor's or master's degree**  
(Greenland Statistics)

When asking the female managers both in the private retail sector and in the educational sector, the statements appeared similar. A private retail manager said: "I don't think there are differences between the genders; we work on equal terms. Between the employees, there is the right mix of men and women". Another manager in retail said: "We almost only get female applicants for open positions. We

are looked upon as a female workplace". The same store owner said: "Well, at home it is funny they still live in a traditional family pattern. The boys free ride when it comes to domestic chores and the mother takes care of the kids and the house". At the catering school, there is equality, if we ask the female teacher and the head of the education department: "We have men who clean the floors and women in management. This is looked at as being normal. The male service personnel are just as good as the female personnel".

### 5.3.3 Belonging

Belonging and staying are sometimes problematic ambitions when it comes to a place like Narsaq. Of the three locations of this study, Greenland is the only country where the former colonial power backed a series of forced removals in the 1950s and 60s, due to administrative foreclosures of entire settlements and municipalities. That history is part of the cultural focus, as is the fact that the concept of living somewhere might not be a question of settling indefinitely. There is a fighting spirit around claiming the right to stay. One day-care manager said she had noticed that people are moving from Narsaq, their jobs are being moved to larger towns and there is a rise in unemployment. Personally, she would not dream of moving. She is going to fight to the very last, if that is what it comes to.

People want to live in Narsaq, but structural change may be a hindrance. One retail manager said that it is also an issue with the local school. The local teachers have it rough, they are dealing with a lot of troubled families, and that takes its toll. Some of the teachers eventually chose to move. Many locals do not return home, not least due to the poor quality of housing. It is not straightforward to settle back in Narsaq after one has left for education - especially when it comes to having a career. That is not possible.

When the young people do not return to Narsaq, it creates strains for the citizens who remain. They love their town and its surrounding nature. One only needs to revisit the quote from above, about when the town comes alive during the summer months to picture the attraction. Nevertheless, the surroundings are not enough. When interviewing women about the entrepreneurial ideas and the realistic focus on small scale projects, it is not clear if these ideas will create future jobs that might employ qualified people and rejuvenate the school and the local cultural life.

People long for Narsaq's prior days of glory, but a return to that requires young people to settle and have families. This seemed almost utopic when listening in on the interviews. Belonging, however, might also be about a possibility to stay within reaching distance of Narsaq. Within 2023, a new local airport in Qaqortoq is planned (Kommune Kujalleq, 2020). However, it is all about the "ifs" and "whens". Nothing is quite sure, and it is the level of uncertainty and the lack of opportunities for young people in Narsaq which has driven them to seek education and employment elsewhere. During the interviews, we heard very little about detailed planning that would revitalise Narsaq to make it more liveable for young people and make the town a future home base. Young people were often described as being impatient when it comes to reassurances of political plans. Without concrete strategies, there is a real scenario where young people will continue to migrate towards the larger educational, cultural, and employment hubs in Greenland.

### 5.3.4 Attitudes to change and innovation

In the Greenlandic findings this section is divided into a) Past innovation initiatives and b) Future innovative thoughts. In general, Narsaq is relatively well known for different entrepreneurial initiatives related to retail business, such as beer and clothing productions, but also in developing products for the construction industry. Nowadays, the focus is mainly on tourism.

#### 5.3.4.1 Past innovation initiatives

Narsaq has a somewhat lengthy history of being a cradle of innovation. Business or entrepreneurial ideas spring to life, but they somehow run into planning problems. One classic case was the SIKU Block project. The start-up was an experimental construction with Greenlandic building materials. Fully cast concrete elements and the concrete produced in Greenland. The goal was to establish a production in Narsarsuaq, the airport hub in South Greenland. The plan was also to study buildings in Narsaq built of concrete, partly produced in recent times from the SIKU Block concept (Naalakkersuisut, 2015). One store owner tells of the SIKU Block project: "Yes, the SIKU Blocks, it has been hard on Jacob [local entrepreneur]. For many years, it was an uphill battle; finally, he stopped". And she continues: "There is no point in thinking that one can create a million Kroner enterprise in a year. You can't do that. You need to start with small steps like Theo and her soaps".

Another store owner tells about the closed down factories: "We need to have a fish factory or a shrimp factory. They don't have to be different, big fish are in season bass, salmon, and capelin (ammassat)". One local entrepreneur said that last year they had so much fish and shrimp, but no fishermen to fish them.

Narsaq has had some experience with clothing production called 'Polarmagasinet' and with different beer brewing companies. And then there is the gold and uranium mine. It was almost unanimous when talking to the entrepreneurial women and women in management that they strongly opposed further development of the exploration of precious metals including radioactive Uranium. The local mine, which had focused on gold, eventually located Uranium in Kuannersuit, which is a mountain within 10 kilometres of Narsaq. The people we spoke to fear that the mining of Uranium, which is needed in order to get to other valuable minerals, will contaminate the town and eventually lead to an administrative closing of their community, town, and local culture.

This could fall under a category of innovation and entrepreneurship. Mining will create many jobs - but might ruin the town of Narsaq as it is today. Innovation is thus a two-sided medal - jobs and the dynamics that mining would create can be very positive for the whole region in South Greenland, but comes at too high a price, according to the women in this study. At the local day-care centre, the manager related how the town had become polarised over the issue of the mine. She was a former yea-sayer – but she no longer participated in the local debates – they had become too personal. There is too much aggravation, and she did not want to be involved anymore. One local store owner said: "This must be a mining free area. I think that the people themselves can collect stones in nature and make jewellery". The focus both on future and past innovative ideas circulate around sustainable ways of creating jobs and businesses. In this connection, the mine was not viewed as a sustainable solution.

The municipal restructuring was another general issue of concern, being yet another

example of decisions taken far away with huge implications for local possibilities. Subsequently, the region took another massive blow with the renegotiations of the operator of the local transport infrastructure. Originally, Air Greenland held the contract for flights and bookings. However, of late the contract was tendered and taken over by another company, which meant that it abruptly became more complicated to book connecting flights or boats from Narsarsuaq. Other issues have been the boat schedules between different towns and smaller settlements in the region. One local store owner said: "It is crazy. If you get stranded at a particular place, you have to pay for your layover out of your pocket. That scares away the tourists. It is a political decision. The infrastructural planning has been terrible".

#### 5.3.4.2 Future Innovative Thoughts

When we brought up questions of future innovation that would help secure jobs and surplus in the city, our female interviewees had many ideas. Innovation is often closely tied to utopian thoughts, not the Thomas Moore edition, but thought about as the West-German future work shop about how one would move from utopian ideas towards realisable practices (Jungk & Müllert, 1989). In the following, we give examples of some of these ideas and will briefly touch upon the possibility of realisation.

In the local *Brugsen* store (co-op super market chain present in all of the countries of this study), the local manager suggested that Narsarmiut (people from Narsaq) should look into both seaweed production, which can be harvested straight from the sea, and how they could work better with sheep skin. The latter is a product that is mostly viewed as surplus from the slaughterhouse Neqi A/S. A local store manager has a supplemental idea about the start-up process: "It needs to be small scale. There isn't any point in aiming for a million kroner enterprise. You need something to start-up or begin with. And you need something (income) on the side. You need starting capital in Narsaq, and there is not a lot of that".

At a local farm close to Narsaq, one of the farm managers had a clothing production on the side. She had just started to sell to private people around the country. She did not have any storage. It was a classical concept of starting and running a small business on the side. However, she still wondered about how to make it grow, and what kind of support system would be in place for companies like hers. She also envisioned becoming a beekeeper. She mostly kept her ideas to herself. She has experienced that people have piggybacked on her ideas in the past.

One local entrepreneur from a family of entrepreneurs said locals should rely more upon and utilise nature. For example, she came up with the idea of using herbs for tea or other remedies. She eventually began to produce soap. She received help with the soap production from a friend who owns a factory in Denmark.

Aside from the above-described wishes for the re-establishment of fish factories and the mining questions that still loom, most of the ideas around Narsaq are relatively concrete. There are not talks of a fun park, a giant sports arena, an international airport, or ideas on that scale. They are all visions of industries on small family-based and privately based levels.

#### 5.3.5 Commuting and mobility

Commuting is not an option because there is no place in Narsaq to commute to and

from. Commuting implies that it is often to and from one's residential environment to one's work environment. The nearest town is Qaqortoq, and it is around 1.5 hours by boat. Nevertheless, there is no regular daily boat route, and even if there were, weather conditions in the local area are often quite unpredictable and likely to affect any travel plans.

Therefore, when talking about commuting and mobility in Narsaq, it is really only mobility which is relevant. The situation in Narsaq is covered in the location description above, and shows that Narsaq has experienced a steady decline in inhabitants after the municipalities of the south merged. Narsaq lost 20 high functioning positions, which led to 20+ families relocating, mostly to Qaqortoq. Narsaq has a local community school, but few real further educational opportunities aside from the large catering school. This means that the majority of young people in Narsaq move to larger towns for further employment. One telling statement is from the local day-care manager, who noticed that once they move, the young people do not return. She herself would not dream of moving.

When it comes to mobility on an everyday basis, there are not many examples around Narsaq. However, there are examples from most of the women in management positions. They all moved long distances to study and to work. Some moved from northern Greenland and eventually started families of their own in the town. In a community like Narsaq, there will always be some citizens who are drifting through the town. There is even a term for it in Greenland: 'the professional nomads' – it is the people with a sort of universal education, i.e. a profession that is applicable all over Greenland, such as teachers, electricians, welders, carpenters, social workers, and nurses. Such professional nomads consist of a mix between people in welfare professions and skilled labourers, and these are often highly mobile in moving between jobs across Greenland.

### 5.3.6 Summary: Themes and trends Narsaq

When addressing the women of the business community in Narsaq, it is tourism and the local industry that they draw attention to. According to the women, these two sectors should keep Narsaq running, together with small businesses – the latter goes without saying. One immediate challenge or issue we would point to here, is that it might sound as a re-active state for the community of Narsaq to find itself in. It sounds like the business community is playing a waiting game, gazing at the Tunulliarfik Fjord for the cruise ships in the summer or the sheep transports in the autumn. The action comes from outside and in towards Narsaq. The re-active state could be a pivotal point for more active future plans. I.e. what about winter tourism? How could that be presented? We have seen scenarios like this in the north, where smaller settlements like Ilimanaq near Ilulissat in the Disco Bay area has undertaken international fund raising and established tourist huts for short weekend stays etc. When we visited the community of Narsaq, it was awaiting the summer season for outside input, combining this with a definite rejection of further mining activity.

We studied Narsaq by setting up interviews with women in management positions, tapping in on the environment of female managers, and by observing around the town. This qualitative approach to the otherwise classical mixed methods with quantitative and qualitative methods let us explore the social world of women's voices about business in the town (Hesse-Biber, 2010). There are very few prior Greenlandic studies with such a focus on women's perspectives. It testifies to the

importance of sometimes choosing an explicit gender perspective, because we are not sure that we would have addressed so many women, if the study had been just about entrepreneurship in an around Narsaq.

When studying the community in general and talking to people in Narsaq, agency is present in the business community – they are ready to act, but lack a proper plenum for having these discussions. We did not hear any talks about a local business council. The municipality of South Greenland does have a collective council, which is currently male dominated, (Kommune Kujalleq, 2019). The entrepreneurial women in this study did not bring up the municipal business council or mention their local representative. A local developing group could be a good place to start. It is obvious that they have had these talks in the town before, but just not in the period when we were visiting. During our visit, we heard ideas about furthering the local products, tourism, and fishery. It spoke to an energy in Narsaq, an energy that could be very fruitful as soon as the right momentum presents itself.

## 6. Differences and similarities across the three study locations

In this chapter, we compare the findings from our three locations and discuss major differences and similarities. The order of presentation follows the one above, and hence the following five themes are discussed: 1) flexible work lives, 2) family life and gender roles, 3) belonging, 4) attitudes to change and innovation, and 5) commuting and mobility. We end with a subchapter discussing generational similarities and differences, highlighting the attitudes and experiences related to us by our youngest interviewees. As local youth are key to the future demographic sustainability of the places in focus, their views and perceptions for example of local gender roles and labour market possibilities are important to assess.

### 6.1 Flexible work lives

This report overall has focused substantially on work life flexibility as a means to reach the goal of sustainable demographic development in the three relatively isolated areas. When looking across the data set, substantial differences appear in this connection. Thus, regular wage labour (either in the shape of full-time employment, or – for women in particular – as part-time positions) seemed much more the norm in Suðuroy, whereas interviewees on Læsø recounted many experiences with more flexible approaches to work life. Narsaq somehow presents a middle position in this comparison – full-time wage labour is important in this location, not least underscored by the dramatic loss of public sector jobs following the Greenlandic municipal reform. Nevertheless, seasonal variation in demand and supply of work also made a tangible impact locally in Narsaq, and with hopes for receiving more tourists, this pattern may be amplified in the future. The data set from Narsaq thus includes accounts from interviewees who desire more seasonal jobs and/or more flexible hours.

#### 6.1.1 Seasonal jobs

The role (or potential role) of tourism in creating an income base for local residents leaves certain marks on the locality in terms of work-life patterns and family and work-life balance. In some respects, Læsø seemed most advanced here regarding concrete experiences with the impact of tourism on the local labour market. While regular full-time wage labour was certainly also widespread on Læsø, even people with such jobs and regular income would often *also* work overtime or take on additional jobs during the busy summer season. Hence, seasonal variation was pronounced in Læsø, even to the extent of some interviewees talking about “going into hibernation” during winter, to make up for 14-hour workdays during summer. Especially young persons from Læsø talked about the winter as “boring” or even “dead”. The social norm on Læsø seemed to be to work hard during summer, and all the older school children we talked to also had summertime jobs in restaurants and shops. As one shopkeeper expressed, it was more or less an obligation to keep the



shop open during all hours the entire summer. "When it is summer, you have to be prepared to remain on the island, you do not move, you work, as long as there are tourists you work. After all, it is a bit of an obligation to move to such a place". Another shopkeeper expressed frustration that not more local shops were working to extend the season. The way he saw the current situation, it should be possible to also attract 'another kind' of tourists during the winter, but only if shops and restaurants and other facilities would agree on a joint plan for this.

Narsaq also experiences pronounced seasonal variation in availability of jobs. The offseason is long and tough – it lasts for as long as from October until May, which is contrasted with the summertime, which is described by locals as a time of prosperity and work. While most of the summertime activity in Læsø, however, is linked to tourism, tourism is only a very partial explanation for the summer bustle in Narsaq. Another highly contributing factor is sheepherding. Being situated in the south of Greenland, Narsaq is among the few localities in the country where there are substantial possibilities for farming, and especially sheepherding is a significant element in the local income base. Thus, the local slaughterhouse in Narsaq provides jobs for approximately 30 people all year round, but around 100 during the slaughtering of lambs in September. With a local population hovering around 1,400 inhabitants, the extra 70 jobs for the month of September are highly significant. Summertime also opens up for other types of income generating activities: berry and herb picking (both for consumption but also for local soap production), hunting and fishing. However, fishing is not nearly as important for job creation as it used to be in Narsaq, with shrimp and fish factories having closed down.

Although also reliant to some extent on some of the same income sources (fishing and tourism) as the other two locations, seasonal variation in job availability is not nearly as pronounced in Suðuroy as in the two other locations. This is partly because fishing (and other maritime occupations) still provide many full-time jobs in Suðuroy, and most likely also because the population of the island is significantly larger than in the two other locations. The latter fact entails that much more regular wage employment is available, for example in the public sector, with no less than five primary schools, an upper secondary school, a hospital and several other public employers on the island. The population of 4,600 is sufficiently large to warrant a range of public welfare services, and no less than 36% of the working population on the island are employed in the public sector. For Suðuroy, the presence of the public sector forms a stable base to sustain an income for the local population. Public sector employment is highly gendered, with women holding three quarters of public sector jobs.

There is only limited evidence of seasonal variation in workloads and intensity in Suðuroy. However, like with the slaughtering of lambs in Narsaq, there are certain times of the year where the fish factories are busier than at other times. During peak season, 12-hour shifts at the fish factories are the norm. A norm which many informants expressed as incompatible with family life. There is also an emerging and steadily growing tourism sector in Suðuroy, however, few people currently seem to find full-time employment in this sector. Rather, the tourism industry is an added source of income for several informants, but some expressed hope that tourism can become a potential important future employer in Suðuroy. There is an emerging focus on adventure tourism on the island. Furthermore, efforts are also made to attract tourists from other parts of the Faroe Islands during off-season. This can go some way to prolong the season, and even out demand, so that national and

international tourists are not competing for limited resources during the summer season.

### 6.1.2 Changing jobs

A remarkable and perhaps somewhat surprising commonality across all three locations is that locals universally report that jobs are available. "Perhaps not everybody's dream job" as one person put it, but in all three locations, people express the sentiment that for those willing to work, there are jobs to find. However, in most cases, such jobs are available in unskilled and less skilled professions and often in temporary positions. The issue of limited job opportunities is, therefore, mostly related to finding suitable employment, rather than finding an actual job. Informants in all three locations indicated that presently, there are enough jobs available, albeit not the right positions for educated people. Furthermore, there was a consensus that the most significant labour market adjustment people in Suðuroy make is the acceptance that career mobilities are limited. Another feature of the labour market in Suðuroy is the length of time that some individuals work as reliefs, holding either temporary contracts or being called-on upon demand. Working as a relief is a feature especially in the public sector, and although evident elsewhere in the Faroe Islands, such precarious contact with the labour market appears to be more prevalent and lengthier in Suðuroy.

Also in Læsø, temporary work seemed prevalent, not only in the public sector but frequently also in tourism-related businesses. As expressed by one informant, "you can get three weeks there, then five months here, then somebody needs a worker there, and so on. I think some people find this fun. But if you come here and have an education and say 'This is the only thing I want to do', then it's not that easy". Similarly as in Suðuroy, career opportunities for the highly educated were minimal at best, and many interviewees on Læsø expressed that job opportunities took second priority in deciding where to live. Hence, several informants on Læsø prioritised place over job, some newcomers had even taken complete leaps of faith and moved to the island without prior family connections or jobs at their hands. In Suðuroy, most newcomers were returnees in one way or the other, and return was commonly precipitated by at least one spouse having a job ready at hand.

Læsø thus attracted residents who strongly prioritised the island location over job opportunities, and we encountered several interviewees who were originally educated or trained within one profession, but had later changed tracks and/or reported that they would do so, if current efforts failed to provide them with a reliable income or satisfactory life situation. Changing to a different line of work was by many people on Læsø articulated as a first priority, rather than moving away if current work life arrangements could not continue. This contrasted somewhat with the situation in Narsaq, where we both encountered people who had moved to the place because of job opportunities, but also people who would be willing to leave, if the right job opportunity appeared elsewhere. This does not entail that job mobility was necessarily lower in one location or the other, thus we encountered rather dramatic changes in careers in all three locations, examples include from banker to sheepherder, from child carer to store manager, and from librarian to designer. However, social as well as individual acceptance of deskilling seemed pronounced in Læsø, and locals who had accepted jobs they were de facto overqualified for were put forward as examples to follow during the debate meeting we had arranged at

the local town hall.

### 6.1.3 Working flexible hours

Working flexible hours in most cases entails working more than the official norm, when considering information gathered in Narsaq and Læsø. In Narsaq, a very high number of interviewed women had much longer working weeks than the 40-hour norm, for example within retail, the reported norm was around 10 hours per day. Also in other professions, people worked long hours. For instance, one farmer outside Narsaq reported a 5am-10pm workday, and a farmer on Læsø drily commented "You don't become a farmer to become rich, it's a lifestyle, not an 8am-4pm job". Blending working life and family life was a common feature among people with such long hours. One farmer emphasised the fact that his children could generally walk in and out of the houses and stable buildings and simply find an adult who had time to spend with them. Attending to the needs of children could be challenging, especially for those working in tourism related businesses on Læsø. One father said, "In the summer, we do not have time to have children". Similarly, to the Narsaq farmer's working hours, self-reported working hours in the tourism sector on Læsø was commonly 12-14 hours per day during summer. In which case, many parents were trying to make up for lost family time during winter, for example by going on family holidays during school time – a balance which many parents commented on as challenging.

Flexible hours and generally flexible work-life balances seemed less common on Suðuroy, except for the widespread pattern of women working reduced hours. Informants on Suðuroy spoke at length about time as being less structured, and life on the island as generally less controlled by the clock. The main exception to this is the ferry timetable, which to some extent dictates mobility patterns, at least those involving off-island appointments. Informants from Læsø also spoke about time as moving slower and dictating speed to a much lesser degree than elsewhere in Denmark – not least the two former Copenhageners we interviewed emphasised this. In the case of Læsø, however, the ferry was not spoken of as dictating schedules – on the contrary, some people even claimed that the frequent inability of the ferry to travel (due to bad weather, wrong wind directions, or engine break-downs) served as a sobering reminder that we need not always stress about. It should be underlined, however, that the question of the frequent ferry break-downs was a bone of contention on the island – some deplored the situation and urgently called for investments in a new ferry, others considered this part of the charm of island living.

Romantic notions of time moving slower and allowing for greater freedom also seemed to exist in Narsaq, and in Greenland more generally. Having a flexible work-life in Greenland is considered a positive thing, because it provides the ability to choose when to work. This is closely linked to the romantic image of the fishing and hunting community, where people go out to gather supplies when needed and/or weather permits. This idea of freedom still lingers in many cases, even if not realised in people's actual working lives. As argued by Gaini about modern masculinities in Greenlandic towns, "What used to be the main characteristics of a 'real man', an independent hunter following the traditions of his ancestors, lie beyond the modern town's typical repertoire of styles and work" (Gaini, 2017, p. 51). Interestingly, therefore, work-life flexibility seems to have both a real but also an imagined side to

it, and it may seem that the imagined freedom to work flexible hours plays at least as big a role as actual working hour practices.

## 6.2 Family life and gender roles

There are two important commonalities across the three settings when it comes to family life and gender roles. The first commonality is that the three settings are considered good places in which to raise kids, especially if one values freedom and the possibilities for children to roam around in nature. Particularly respondents on Suðuroy and Læsø spoke at length about this, and for several interviewees on Læsø, this had been an important factor in deciding to move to the island. Considering the data set from Suðuroy, this factor - along with strong family connections and social networks - were important features in deciding to move to the island. One interesting difference when looking at the question of child rearing in Suðuroy and Læsø was that in both places, people reported good conditions for this based on networks and helping each other out, but in Suðuroy these networks relied mostly on family, whereas in Læsø, neighbours, the bus driver and simply the community as a whole were counted in. For example, a young woman told us how she has been at the grocery store as a small kid and was a few crowns short of being able to pay. Then the lady behind her in the queue simply gave her the last money and said, "I think I know who your mom is, so I'll just get it from her when I see her". The girl to this day had no idea who it was who had helped her, but assumed her mum had indeed paid the money.

In this way, Suðuroy does seem more like a family-oriented setting than both Læsø and Narsaq, although all three settings are considered good places for bringing up children by interviewees. However, in both Læsø and Narsaq, parents have to consider the fact that most children will have to move away already for secondary education. In Narsaq, one respondent mentioned how her daughter had later returned to raise her kids near their grandparents, but in Læsø many simply emphasised that when the children return on holidays as adults, they stay longer and therefore, extended families get more "quality time" together.

The second commonality across the data set is that virtually everyone claimed gender roles to be equal, but when giving concrete examples, it often turned out that women would be more likely to take on the bulk of household related chores and work in typical 'female occupations'. Thus, as discussed in connection with the data from Narsaq, some respondents said they do not experience a difference between men and women in jobs and the educational system, but proceed to convey that it is women who run the household and look after children. While for example respondents from the catering school in Narsaq commented that they both had male cleaners and female managers, it was also a Narsaq respondent who said "The boys' free ride when it comes to domestic chores and the mother takes care of the kids and the house". In contrast to this, some parents and grandparents in Læsø pointed out how being able to do domestic chores at a young age was an advantage of having to leave Læsø for further education right after primary school. Both boys and girls simply needed to know how to wash their own clothes, because they move away from home at 15 or 16 years old.

Gender segregation on the labour market is high in all three locations, not least in

Greenland, which is dominated by a large and predominantly female public sector. Educational attainment is also much higher among females than males in Greenland. In Suðuroy, it seems that cultural norms of work-family balance entail that in practice, women often modify their labour market participation and work part-time to create space for flexibility and respond to family needs. In Læsø, the cultural norm of work-family balance seemed in many cases related to seasonal variation in workloads. Hence, many reported spending less time with children during summer, but also that it would be ok to take children out of the school to go on holiday with them during winter, because the parents did not have time to spare during the school summer holidays. Thus, both women and men working more than full-time during parts of the year would be part of the local norm on Læsø.

One last interesting aspect relating to gender roles is the views expressed by young people in Læsø and Suðuroy. Most of the youth we talked to (and received essays from in the case of Suðuroy) identified local gender roles as quite traditional. For example, the young woman on Læsø saying about jobs for women and men on the island, "you are either a carer or a fisher, that's what it is like". In several cases, perceived local gender roles seemed to be part of the reason for young people not to want to live on Læsø in the long term.

### 6.3 Belonging

On the question of belonging, our three study locations seem to present rather contrasting situations. Yet, there is one overarching similarity among the three places, namely that local residents in most cases have a strong sense of attachment and affection for their places of residence. But here the similarities seem to end.

Starting with Suðuroy, the overwhelming majority of informants were born and raised locals, and few people choose to settle on the island without a history of connections to place – if not personally, at least through a spouse or other close relative. Furthermore, having a job ready at hand (at least for one spouse) is a prerequisite for many to return to Suðuroy. Those who did move there without prior connections, and without being able to speak the language, reported difficulties in fitting in and obtaining access to community networks. Community networks are generally reported to be strong, but access to them to some extent depends on family relations and perhaps becoming part of a family-in-law, which provides newcomers access to networks.

This differs rather sharply from the impression from Læsø. First of all, there were many newcomers among our informants, and many of these were without prior family attachment to the island. For example, some had simply spent a few holidays on the island before deciding to move there, and in at least three cases, it was job opportunities and the excitement of moving to a new place, which had lured newcomers to Læsø. Interestingly, several born and bred islanders spoke rather self-critically about being bad at welcoming new people and letting them into community networks, whereas those recently arrived we spoke to, all expressed that they felt warmly welcomed. One such informant, living in a same-sex marriage, said he had in fact worried a little about how they would be received as a couple, but reported to have been met only with warmth and a welcoming attitude.

Many network activities seemed to take place on Læsø, both in terms of sports,

knitting clubs, hunting parties and other spare time activities. But also through more formal coordination in the many local associations on the island, which numbered both ones for farmers, fishers, and people working in the tourism sector, as well as the volunteer fire brigade and civil defence corps. These formal network associations also collaborated extensively with each other, for example on organising harbour festivals or attending mainland tourism fairs (where the fisheries association would for example help in promoting Læsø). Accessing community networks thus seemed relatively easy, and not dependent on family relations or prior attachment to the island. Indeed, a few days after interviewing some young men active in the local football club, we learned that they had actually invited some newcomers to join them – conceivably because of our questions about access to local networks for newcomers.

Community life and networking thus seemed vibrant in both Suðuroy and Læsø, but more dependent on family relations in the first location compared to the second one. This sense of a vibrant community stands in stark contrast to the mood encountered in Narsaq, where sensations of belonging certainly existed, but were direly challenged by structural changes in Greenlandic society. As pointed out in the section on Narsaq, colonial experiences and the history of forced removals of whole settlements entail that cultural understandings of place attachment have been put under pressure, and belonging and staying may become problematic ambitions. Adding to this, the municipal reform in Greenland in 2009 has further hampered possibilities for staying in Narsaq. Not only has the outflow of municipal employees formerly working in local administration lowered the number of local residents. But the emigrants also in many cases represent cultural capital which has now left the town, entailing that teachers at the local school are left with fewer children from homes with resources to assist their children's learning. This depletes both the local school and the local community life of much needed resources to rejuvenate the town. Despite the natural surroundings and beauty of the place, which is reported as much loved and a central factor in creating a sense of belonging by residents in all three locations, the long-term development of Narsaq seems much more challenged than that of Suðuroy and Læsø.

## 6.4 Attitudes to change and innovation

Being a former colony, Greenland has historically experienced many exogenous development projects, which have had more or less disastrous consequences for local social and cultural life. Exogenous economic development is defined as externally driven development projects, which have historically often been targeted at 'lagging' rural areas. "This early form of intervention was initiated by external institutions, and enabled by external capital, leaving rural territories as mere pawns in a national development game" (Mitchell & Madden, 2014, p. 145). In the case of Greenland, however, it has often been a case not only of external intervention from national institutions, but frequently from Danish authorities with little knowledge of local conditions and social realities. Understandably, several interviewees from Narsaq expressed scepticism about current exogenous development projects, whether in the shape of gold or uranium mining, often driven by foreign Chinese or American interests. Especially the prospects of uranium mining were strongly opposed by many respondents, and the issue was reported to have polarised opinions in town.

Many reported fearing contamination of the town and eventual administrative closure, if uranium mining possibilities are further pursued. However, it was not only exogenously driven mining projects which caused concern in Narsaq, also infrastructure decisions impacted adversely on local possibilities. Such exogenous projects date from the historic American decision to build an airport in Narsarsuaq during WWII, to the current national Greenlandic decision to hand over local transportation between Narsarsuaq and remaining local towns from Air Greenland to a new operator. Such decisions - taken far away from local realities - have had huge impacts on local business opportunities, and therefore also on demographic development. This was also true of local council (situated in the municipal main town of Qaqortoq) zoning decisions in Narsaq, impacting adversely at least one local entrepreneur. The entrepreneur in question had recently completed a production facility at a site which in the meantime became relegated to a purely residential zone of the town by the municipal authorities (who had never visited her production site, she emphasised).

Consequently, much more optimism and faith among interviewees was found in local endogenous or perhaps neo-endogenous development ideas. Endogenous development is perhaps best explained as the opposite of exogenous development. "At its crux, this locally-driven approach seeks to construct sustainable and resilient communities by animating local resources to create territorial identity, by mobilizing local labour, and by building local factor capacities" (Mitchell and Madden, 2014, p.145). However, as Stockdale points out, a purely endogenous development process may lead to self-centred and conservative approaches to local economic development (Stockdale, 2006, p. 356). According to Stockdale, what is required for local economic development is a combination. She thus concludes that "rural endogenous development policy on its own will have limited success in regenerating depopulating areas", and that this needs to be coupled with "Exogenous measures of support [which] should therefore enable rural communities to achieve their goal of economic regeneration" (Stockdale, 2006, p.364). Mitchell and Madden conclude with hopes for what they term 'neo-endogenous development'. Neo-endogenous development "promotes the same goal as endogenous development, but does so by incorporating extra-locally accumulated capital factors derived from either ex-situ stakeholders [...], or, in-situ newcomers" (Mitchell & Madden, 2014, p. 146).

Interviewees in Narsaq pointed to good examples of entrepreneurship related to usage of existing natural resources such as herbs for tea and soap production, or wool for clothes. Other ideas were also mentioned, for example using seaweed or the sheepskin from the local slaughterhouse, which is - as yet - an unused locally available resource. Plenty of concrete ideas for endogenous or neo-endogenous development existed in Narsaq, but it was also pointed out that several of these ideas would probably only be realisable if one had some income on the side, at least during a start-up period.

In this sense, the data from Narsaq resembles Læsø to some extent, insofar as many ideas for start-ups also existed in this location, and many had indeed been realised (oftentimes with some other income on the side). On Læsø, we encountered many entrepreneurs, both among newcomers and long-time residents, including also young returnees, who had migrated to the mainland for education and training, but had returned to Læsø to set up a business. Several interviewees on Læsø, however, spoke of reluctance to newcomers and new ideas. Interestingly, it was often old-timers rather than newcomers themselves, who argued that there was probably too much



scepticism towards newcomers in general, and new business ideas in particular. Most of the newcomers we spoke to were in fact quite hesitant to express negative sentiments about how they and their businesses had been received locally.

Our data indicates that, in some ways, the community least open to entrepreneurship and new business ideas is Suðuroy. This is partly due to the fact that island identity is strongly tied to fishing and the maritime industry. While the local langoustine factory is still the largest private employer on Læsø and people also called for a new fish factory in Narsaq, local entrepreneurship in these two locations seemed to hinge much less on fish. As expressed by one interviewee from Suðuroy, talking about potential investors in private business development, "they are so set upon thoughts about fish". Although locals in Suðuroy are starting to see opportunities in tourism, informants also reported that some people are highly resistant and conservative in terms of new ideas for businesses. Some spoke of people in Suðuroy as having an open attitude to that which is different, e.g. the opening of cafés, tourism initiatives as well as different sexualities. Nevertheless, from our empirical work in Suðuroy, we also identified a resistance towards women who work long hours or who sell products and services not traditionally associated with women. This phenomenon was not encountered on Læsø, where for example two young men and one young woman (from the same year in the local primary school) had all recently returned as slaughterers, and one female entrepreneur on the island had daughters working as an engineer and a ship's captain respectively.

It was also pointed out on Suðuroy that a lack of diversity in start-ups may partly be attributed to the limited official initiatives to support entrepreneurship. Such initiatives are situated in the central area of the Faroe Islands and hence, relatively inaccessible for businesses or would-be businesses on Suðuroy. Thus, an environment supporting entrepreneurship does not exist on Suðuroy. Again this contrasts with Læsø, where there was a strong local business association partly supported by the municipality, and strongly supporting each other. Also in Narsaq, there was support for entrepreneurs, in this case, however, in the shape of the national support system under the auspices of Greenland Business.

## 6.5 Commuting and mobility

Mobility and commuting is the one theme where the starkest contrasts between our three locations are found. This is undoubtedly so because of the significant differences in geographic characteristics of each location, not least the fact that commuting is an impossibility in Narsaq, even on a weekly basis, as we see some interviewees do in Suðuroy and Læsø.

Despite the geographic constraints, however, interviewees in Narsaq often proved highly mobile when considered over a lifetime. Thus, several had experience of living elsewhere, and clearly had moved for job and educational opportunities during their lifetime. In fact, such mobility seemed to be encouraged, for example when the local shop owner said about the young girls she hired, "I try with all my might to kick them further through the education system. I talk to them a lot about education being important to their lives. We actually talk a lot about it". Another indication of the high levels of mobility in Narsaq, may be seen in the fact that there are many among the interviewees who are not born and bred in the location. Therefore, despite the

recent reduction from approximately 2,000 inhabitants in 2000 to around 1,600 in 2019 (see figure 8), some newcomers actually live there.

Considering the data from Læsø, there are many newcomers among our interviewees. Although the initial contact with the local settlement consultant may of course have skewed our sample in this direction, we did in fact recruit most of our interviewees through chatting on the ferry, putting up notices on boards in local shops, and simply walking into shops and asking for interviews. Furthermore, it is clear from the data from Læsø that virtually everyone had spent longer or shorter periods off the island, often for educational purposes, but many had also worked on the mainland for longer and shorter durations. In this sense, also the Læsø population seemed highly mobile, retaining a high mobility potential (Kaufmann, Bergman and Joye 2004). The strongest indication of a high level of mobility potential on Læsø may be found in the adamant rejections virtually everyone gave us, when we asked whether they saw it as a problem that the young people have to leave the island to pursue education already at the age of 15 or 16.

The people of Suðuroy are highly mobile, and mobility defines life on the island. Practically all of our informants who have grown up on Suðuroy have at some point lived off the island, for educational or work purposes. The same pattern was discernible amongst the youngsters whom we spoke to and received essays from. Despite their young age and having the opportunity for secondary education on the island, many were already contemplating leaving the island for educational or work purposes. This is likely also connected to the feeling of smallness and social surveillance, which entails that young people feel constantly watched. This was also evident in Narsaq and Læsø, and one of the young people interviewed on Læsø pointed out, "I think everybody knows everybody, it can be a good thing, but it can also be a bad thing".

Some youngsters in Suðuroy reported wanting to return upon having gained an education and life experience. However, the reality of few employment opportunities for highly educated people led some to resign to this possibly not being an option. For several of the young men, who imagine working long-distance at sea or offshore, work involves following the job. Therefore, their living in Suðuroy is no obstacle to a career.

In terms of daily commutes, few travel on a daily basis to Tórshavn for work. However, the ferry is a reality of living on the island, and for many, frequent travelling is necessary for participation in sport, for meetings, to attend medical appointments and social events. One of our informants referred to the frequent ferry journeys as "all we have ever known". Despite frustrations concerning ferry irregularities (due to weather and mechanical failures), the people of Suðuroy are resigned to the ferry and frequent mobilities being part and parcel of life on Suðuroy.

## 6.6 Generational similarities and differences

The data obtained among youth from Suðuroy (interviews and essays) and Læsø (interviews) indicates that in some respects, there were clear generational differences, whilst in others there were similarities. Young people in both Læsø and Suðuroy share with adults the sentiment that their island is a wonderful place to grow up. They appreciate the island, village feel of growing up with access to nature,

vast spaces, feeling safe and being free to roam. However, the intimacy and interconnectedness of relations, which most of our adult informants appreciate, proved somewhat stifling for several of the youngsters. When our adult informants referred to gossip, we enquired about experiences of rumours and gossip. This, most of them explained, was something that one got used to, and chose to ignore.

Youngsters, on the other hand, found this inhibiting to their freedom. One of the young girls on Læsø explained: "For example, if you just hear an ambulance passing by, you think 'who is it?', and before it is even on board the ferry, everyone will know who it is". As they had gotten older and wanted to escape adult surveillance, mobility and action proved difficult. Consequently, being drawn to urban places, in which one can experience anonymity, is a characteristic of many youngsters in small places (Bjarnason & Thorlindsson, 2006).

One thing also discussed among your young informants on Læsø was the business of finding a girlfriend or boyfriend - not an easy feat on an island, partly because "you've been looking at the same girls your whole life", and partly because everyone would know about even the slightest flirt. Dating had to take place on the mainland or during the busy summer season, when everyone was too busy to notice, and there would be 'new meat' to find among the tourists.

From interviews with youngsters and the essays they wrote, it is apparent that their view of gender roles and what kind of education they anticipate, at least at this age (9<sup>th</sup> grade in lower secondary school), is relatively traditional. This was also true of the youth from Læsø, where one young man in a focus group interview said he wanted become an electrician, and we asked whether any of the girls would want the same. To this suggestion, one young girl replied "In my head, it's always been like an electrician is a man". Furthermore, our young informants shared with adult informants the view that employment opportunities on both islands for highly educated people limits the potential for population growth. No surprisingly, this has a bearing on how young people view their future. Whilst they displayed a sense of place-belongingness, this attachment for them does not necessarily translate into a future on the island. Several youngsters referred to returning to live on the island as desirable, however, the realities of education and career entails that they believe it realistic and even likely, they will live elsewhere, in Tórshavn for instance. However, they also seem to believe that in future, a subsea tunnel is a reality, which can be a game changer in terms of where people live. Thus, living in Suðuroy and working in the Tórshavn area can enable daily commutes.

Our adult and young informants agree on how they view relations between urban Tórshavn (what people in Suðuroy term 'norðanfjørðs' or North of the fjord) and Suðuroy. They perceive people in the North to lack insight and understanding of the challenges of living in Suðuroy. Our adult informants refer to negative discourses in the media concerning Suðuroy. However, young people went further, and several times referred to people in the North looking down on them, and laughing at their local distinct Suðuroy dialect. In this vein, many youngsters wanted to defend their identity and dialect, whilst some felt somewhat embarrassed. Although both youth and adults also on Læsø made clear distinctions between people on their island and those 'from across the water', however, the tone was not antagonistic, and most people (young and old alike) had frequent business on the mainland, for example going shopping or catching a movie. One father of a teenage girl drily remarked that while his daughter was envious of mainland girls who could go to the shopping

centre whenever they please, probably they would not be allowed to spend as much money as she did on her occasional visits.

In a similar vein, many youngsters on Suðuroy sometimes travel to Tórshavn (and further north) to participate in sporting events or be part of the urban youth culture. This includes going shopping in Tórshavn and hanging out in the shopping centre in Tórshavn. Nevertheless, many recognise that styles differ between Tórshavn and Suðuroy with youngsters in Tórshavn having a more urban look. The girls in Tórshavn, the young people explained, are more inclined to wear jewellery, have their nails done etc. compared to the girls in Suðuroy. The young people attributed this to their rural farmlike ways of living. In this sense the youngsters echoed the older generation in recognising that lifestyle is different in Suðuroy, but mobility is central to participation.

## 7. Conclusion

Notwithstanding the complexities inherent in comparing locations which differ on so many parameters, we argue that there is added value in the comparison, as knowledge gained from our research may contribute to planning of sustainable long-term demographic and economic development, and deepen our understanding of how policy needs to be grounded in place. Specifically, we derive the following six lessons from our analyses above:

1. **Interactions of gender and place:** small places may fruitfully consider how gender and place interact locally, potentially limiting (perceived) options in the labour market
2. **Community networks:** ensuring open and multiple local networks are paramount in supporting settlement/population retention
3. **Supporting entrepreneurial spirit:** entrepreneurship benefits from overt support
4. **Prioritising 'the good life':** perceptions about 'the good life' often take presidency over perceived career possibilities when choosing where to settle
5. **Mobility strategies:** mobility is part and parcel of place, especially small places
6. **Butterfly effects:** because small places are small, even minor changes have a tendency to develop amplified effects

During the rest of this chapter, we develop these arguments further and attempt to indicate potential measures to take, to support the long-term demographic and economic viability of geographically relatively isolated areas.

**Interactions of gender and place:** Our theoretical framework presented in chapter 2 includes a reference to Forsberg's thesis about 'local gender contracts' (Forsberg 1998; 2001). Based on our interview-evidence, it does seem fair to say that such place-specific understandings of the role of women and men in local communities do exist – or, at the least, are perceived to exist – which is potentially even more significant. Interestingly, it was especially the younger women in each of our three locations who expressed that certain jobs were almost gender specific. The local labour market was often perceived as restricted in terms of gender, with jobs particularly for women. Examples include a young woman commenting how local jobs for women seemed primarily available in the care sector, and a somewhat older woman telling about how she was met with resistance when attempting to start up a business within a field that was considered traditionally 'male' dominated. Whether or not such resistance and restrictions are imagined or actual, it hardly makes much difference to the young women growing up in these places. If they perceive their options as restricted based on gendered patterns of work, they may very likely be voting with their feet and leave the local area. The local statistical data also confirms an absence of young women (19-39 years) in the three locations.

Therefore, actively renegotiating (whether real or imagined) local gender contracts may be a powerful tool in reversing long-term trends in gendered settlement patterns. Here schools and other local educational institutions play an important role in pointing to education and career possibilities that break with traditional patterns of gender segregation, but local professional associations could conceivably also play a big role in changing such patterns. Embryonic evidence of a growing

awareness for such a need to attract the less represented gender within a particular field of employment can be found on Læsø. Here we talked about possibilities for attracting young women to farming, downplaying traditional masculinities associated with fishing, and attracting men to care work in the face of recruitment challenges in these fields. Local educational institutions and local professional associations may potentially have much to gain from such collaboration, for example in showing youth the diversity of local possibilities in the labour market, and counteracting the tendency for educational institutions to be teaching local youth to leave (Corbett, 2013).

**Community networks:** In extension of the point above, it is clear from the data that community networks play an important role in maintaining a socially vibrant life in local places. This is right from informal networks such as knitting clubs or extended families, to formalised professional associations, such as fishing or farming associations. Three important points regarding networks stand out from the analysis in terms of ensuring long-term demographic viability of local communities. The first two relate to the openness of such networks. First of all, it is important that networks are open to welcome newcomers. In Suðuroy, it seems that access to networks is very often family-based and relatively open when marrying into a local family-in-law. For newcomers without previous connections, however, social networks are much more closed. Yet, family-based access opportunities may not be enough in the longer run to ensure continued settlement of newcomers. This may call for a conscious strategy of establishing more interest-based networks, for example based on spare time or professional activities. This may be supplemented by a strategy of introducing newcomers to available networks. Such efforts were systematically pursued on Læsø by hiring a local settlement consultant, who among other things did exactly this: introduce new and potential settlers to local associations and networks.

Secondly, evidence suggests that local communities stand to gain much from different networks developing better ties to each other. A case in point is how the local fishing association on Læsø has developed its collaboration with the local tourism board. This creates win-win situations, where the tradition of fishing and local fish delicacies are promoted as part of the image of Læsø as a tourist destination; and where tourists and their children are also exposed to develop an interest in fishing as a profession. The latter was something which the local head of the fishing association pointed out as extremely important at a time where recruitment into the field is challenged. Similar collaborations could conceivably be developed in many other rural locations in the Nordic region.

Thirdly, in Narsaq networks may be dependent on the different seasons. Wintertime is time to prepare for the tourist season. During this time, people meet and for instance discuss politics such as the mining situation and its feared impact on the community. In the summer and tourist season, there are more vibrant activities such as production of local products. The tourists come to town. New students at the local vocational school arrive and so do new pupils for the school. These events are accompanied by summer and fall activity at the harbour and the slaughterhouse Neqi A/S. All these outside influences spark a new vibrant energy through the town. An important priority for the municipality and the local community is to look for ways to harness some of the good summer mood and figure out how to preserve ideas about an entrepreneurial spirit in the winter season.

**Supporting entrepreneurial spirit:** An important function of local networks may also be how they contribute (or not) to support entrepreneurial spirit. Starting a business or being self-employed can be challenging no matter one's location, but particular advantages and drawbacks seem to be associated with doing so in geographically relatively isolated areas, based on our evidence. Drawbacks often centre on questions of mobility, access to materials and markets, as well as the proverbial 'Law of Jante', plus the fact that living in a small close-knit community makes any failure common public knowledge. On the other hand, our evidence also suggests that multi-jobbing or maintaining flexible approaches to how much time one spends on work is very widespread in small locations (partly out of necessity, of course), and this pattern may be particularly conducive to develop start-up businesses, which may not (initially, at least) need to provide the owner with a full income. Furthermore, especially the data from Narsaq highlights how locally developed endogenous initiatives may receive moral support locally, if nothing else simply out of the fact that they are seen as expressions of 'wanting the locality' (an expression which was, in fact, used on Læsø, to make the same point).

Precisely how such local entrepreneurial spirit is best supported, however, is more difficult to tell. Ensign and Borch argue, based on studies of economic and demographic viability of remote localities in Canada, that success in supporting local entrepreneurship and innovation depends on sensitivity to place and people among planners and policy makers (Ensign and Borch, 2016, p.400). Our evidence further suggest that local associations, such as the business association on Læsø, may play an important role in fostering moral support (and sometimes also practical collaboration, for example about sharing an employee or stocking each others' produce) among local business owners. In the case of Suðuroy, it is evident that the local municipality of Vági is leading the way to encourage a more diverse economy, which can be a foundation for start-ups in tourism and adventure economies. In Greenland, a somewhat different solution was reported as paying off, namely a centralised national agency providing practical support (for example in the form of micro loans, accountancy assistance and help with business plan development) as well as moral support (for example through local visits, entering national and international entrepreneurs' fairs etc). Either way, networks were identified as highly important, as was the possibility of maintaining a part-time job on the side while developing one's business idea.

The last point stands out as holding particular promise in developing local strategies. If local public and private employers alike are cognisant of links between the ability to opt for part-time work in combination with developing a local start-up, we may see more businesses develop locally. This would be significant for long-term gendered settlement patterns, as we know from previous research (Hamilton and Otterstad 1998) that the more diverse the local labour market, the less the risk of small localities to develop a 'female deficit'.

**Prioritising 'the good life':** A commonality often repeated among our interviewees is that the local places in focus are considered by their residents as good places to live, and in particular, many identify them as good places to raise children and enjoy family life. Often such arguments were presented as overruling or replacing a need for career advancement. Generally, most of our informants have actively chosen to live in or move to Læsø, Suðuroy or Narsaq, rather than out of necessity. For them, living in these relatively isolated places represents a life in opposition to urban life, which they associate with stress and the financial burden of high mortgages.



Many of our informants are educated and desire work in which they can apply these skills. However, when this is not possible, they are creative and find ways of making a living applying other skills-sets. Therefore, the dominant discourse of career as a continuous identification of and work towards progress, and the often-associated long working hours, is not their most immediate concern. Yet, they do aspire to a meaningful work life and most seek opportunities in which they can apply their educational qualifications - but not at the expense of what they perceive as quality of life, or 'the good life'. Rather, they prioritize the sense of freedom which comes from close relations, slower rhythms and proximity to nature.

**Mobility strategies:** Mobility is important for small relatively isolated areas; perhaps the importance of mobility is even amplified in a relationship inversely related to the size of the locality. As economies, employment, services, and education converge in urban areas, the imperative for access to, and participation in larger markets intensifies (Farrugia 2016). At the centre of participation are mobilities, and we confer with Bærenholdt and Granås in their discussion of relatively isolated areas that "...relationships between mobility and place are crucial in the making of societies" (Bærenholdt and Granås, 2016, p.2). This was evident in our dataset, in which our interviewees repeatedly spoke about the role of ferries, flight schedules and transportation costs in shaping local lives and heartbeat rates. In some ways, mobility is defining for small local places, hence, Eriksen argues about island societies that it would be misleading to consider links to the outside world as "extrasystemic links, as not forming part of the relevant social unit" (Eriksen, 1993, p.134). On the contrary, the links to the outside world define for example how and when tourists arrive, what goods costs in the local store, and that local youth team up and form social networks when leaving to attend educational institutions elsewhere.

The locations are all dependent on sea and (to an extent) air transport, which profoundly impacts mobility options. This stands in stark contrast to road networks on which movement is not confined to travel schedules. At the same time, such schedules are structuring, and rhythms of mobility are disrupted when weather or other obstacles impact arrivals and departures. From a policy perspective, the importance of transport on societal participation are crucial factors which can either contribute or inhibit the sustainability of relatively isolated areas.

Overall, the population in all three locations were highly mobile in different senses: many had lived elsewhere for shorter or longer durations, often in connection with obtaining education, and most had family and friendship ties, sometimes also business interactions, well beyond their immediate geographic vicinity. In this way, links to the outside world were deeply integrated in local social structures, business life and work patterns.

**Butterfly effects:** One finding which is particularly visible from considering the case of Narsaq, but from which we propose there is much to learn for other local places in the Nordic region and beyond, is what we have termed 'the butterfly effect' of centralised decision making, when smaller municipalities get fused into bigger administrative hubs. Decisions, which at a centralized level may seem to involve small numbers and therefore be of less consequence, may acquire amplification in small places. For example, when the municipal reform was introduced in Greenland as of January 2009, a mere 24 public employees lost their jobs at the local municipal administration in Narsaq. However, these jobs were primarily held by well-educated

women and men, who subsequently saw a need to relocate to find new jobs matching their skills and ambitions, and therefore left town together with their families. The effect of the job-losses was thus amplified, not only quantitatively, but also in a gendered manner, as the loss of high-skilled 'female' connoted jobs most likely affected how local young women growing up in Narsaq see their future prospects for obtaining interesting jobs locally. The amplification effects were also classed, as these families generally held more cultural and social capital based on their education levels, and the fact that their children no longer attend the local school has impacted the quality of schooling for the remaining children, as argued by one of our interviewees.

Structural decisions, for example about who should run local boat or flight services, where to place hospital wards or educational institutions, or, indeed, which size of municipality is considered optimal, are frequently and with good reason taken far from small local places. We are not suggesting this could or should necessarily be otherwise. But we propose that undertaking a gender (and class) analysis of how such decisions will most likely affect local populations may be worthwhile, as unintended gendered effects may be counteracted by co-considering place-based specificities.

# References

- Almanna- og Heilsumálaráðið. (2007). *Álit um framtíðar sjúkrahúsvirk í Føroyum*. Almanna- og Heilsumálaráðið.
- Angel, S., Birtø, K., Aadal, L., Holmgaard, P.-M., Vestergaard, L., & Nielsen, F. (2012). Borgerinddragelse og borgercentrering. In B. R. Hjortbak, J. Bangshaab, J. S. Johansen, & H. Lund (Eds.), *Udfordringer til rehabilitering i Danmark*. Rehabiliteringsforum Danmark. Rehabiliteringsforum Danmark.
- Antonsich, M. (2010). Searching for Belonging—An Analytical Framework Searching for belonging. *Geography Compass*, 4(6), 644–659.
- Arnfred, S., & Christensen, J. (2017). "De Søger Trygheden" – Kvinder ramt af hjemløshed i Nuuk. *Psyke & Logos*, 38(1), 23–23.
- Aure, M. (2018). Mobile fathering: Absence and presence of fathers in the petroleum sector in Norway. *gend place cult Gender, Place and Culture - A Journal of Feminist Geography*, 25(8), 1225–1240.
- Aure, M., & Munkejord, M. C. (2016). Creating a Man for the Future: A Narrative Analysis of Male In-Migrants and Their Constructions of Masculinities in a Rural Context. *sociol ruralis Sociologia Ruralis*, 56(4), 531–551.
- Bærenholdt, J. O., & Granås, B. (2016). *Mobility and Place: Enacting Northern European Peripheries*. Taylor and Francis. <http://public.ebookcentral.proquest.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=4512286>
- Beck, U. (1992). *Risk society: Towards a new modernity*. Sage.
- Bennett, J. (2014). Gifted Places: The Indalienable Nature of Belonging in Place. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 32(4), 658–671. <https://doi.org/10.1068/d4913p>
- Bjarnason, T., & Thorlindsson, T. (2006). Should I Stay or Should I Go? Migration Expectations among Youth in Icelandic Fishing and Farming Communities. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 22(3), 290–300.
- Bloksgaard, L., Faber, S., Thidemann, & Hansen, C. D. (2017). Young in a global context: Gender, mobility and belonging in north Denmark. *Remapping Gender, Place and Mobility: Global Confluences and Local Particularities in Nordic Peripheries* /, 191–205.
- Blossfeld, H.-P., Mills, M., & Bernardi, F. (2008). *Globalization, uncertainty and men's careers: An international comparison*. Edward elgar Pub.
- Bock, B. (2004). It still matters where you live: Rural women's employment throughout Europe'. In K. Hoggart & H. Buller (Eds.), *Women in the European countryside* (pp. 14–41). Ashgate.
- Borchorst, A., & Siim, B. (2008). Woman-friendly policies and state feminism. *Feminist Theory*, 9(2), 207–224.
- Brandth, B. (2016). Rural masculinities and fathering practices. *Gender, Place & Culture*, 23(3), 435–450.

- Bryden, J. M., & Hart, K. (2004). *A new approach to rural development in Europe: Germany, Greece, Scotland, and Sweden*. E. Mellen Press.  
<http://catalog.hathitrust.org/api/volumes/oclc/54046707.html>
- Burton-Jones, A. (2003). Knowledge Capitalism: The New Learning Economy. *Policy Futures in Education*, 1(1), 143–159. <https://doi.org/10.2304/pfie.2003.1.1.4>
- Bye, L. M. (2003). Masculinity and rurality at play in stories about hunting. *Norsk Geografisk Tidsskrift*, 145–153.
- Collier, K. (2006). *Social Work With Rural Peoples* (3rd ed.). New Star Books.
- Copenhagen AirTaxi. (2020). *Flyv til Læsø / Ferie på Læsø med Rutetaxi*. Copenhagen AirTaxi. <https://aircat.dk/flyv-til-laesoe/>
- Corbett, M. (2013). I'm going to make sure I'm ready before I leave: The complexity of educational and mobility decision-making in a Canadian coastal community. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 32, 275–282.
- Corbett, M. (2007). All kinds of potential: Women and out-migration in an Atlantic Canadian coastal community. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 23(4), 430–442.
- Cresswell, T. (2010). Towards a Politics of Mobility. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 28(1), 17–31. <https://doi.org/10.1068/d11407>
- Dahlstroem, M. (1996). Young women in a male periphery-experiences from the Scandinavian north. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 12(3), 259.
- Dahlström, M., Aldea-Partanen, A., Fellman, K., Hedin, S., Larsen, N. J., Jóhannesson, H., Manniche, J., Olsen, G. M., & Petersen, T. (2006). *How to Make a Living in Insular Areas—Six Nordic Cases—Nordregio*. Nordregio. <https://archive.nordregio.se/en/Publications/Publications-2006/How-to-Make-a-Living-in-Insular-Areas---Six-Nordic-Cases/index.html>
- Daley, M. R. (2014). *Rural Social Work in the 21st Century*. Lyceum Books.
- de Lima, P. (2012). Boundary Crossings: Migration, Belonging/'Un-belonging' in Rural Scotland. In C. Hedberg & R. M. do Carmo (Eds.), *Translocal Ruralism: Mobility and Connectivity in European Rural Spaces* (pp. 203–217). Springer Netherlands. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-2315-3\\_12](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-2315-3_12)
- Drange, I., Egeland, C., (2014). *Part-Time Work in the Nordic Region II*. Nordic Council of Ministers, & NCM Publications. TemaNord 2014:560
- Drivenes, E.-A. (1985). *Fiskarbonden og gruvelusk*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.
- Economic Council of the Faroe Islands. (2015). *Economic Report (Spring)*.
- Edensor, T. (2011). Commuter: Mobility, rhythm and commuting. In T. Cresswell & P. Merriman (Eds.), *Geographies of mobilities: Practices, spaces, subjects*. Routledge.
- Eikeland, S. (1999). New Rural Pluriactivity? Household Strategies and Rural Renewal in Norway. *Sociologia Ruralis*, 39(3), 359.
- Ellingsæter, A. L. (2013). Scandinavian welfare states and gender (de) segregation: Recent trends and processes. *Economic and Industrial Democracy*, 34(3), 501–518. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0143831X13491616>
- Ellingsæter, A. L., & Leira A. (2006). Introduction: Politicising parenthood in

- Scandinavia. In A. L. Ellingsæter & A. Leira (Eds.), *Politicising parenthood in Scandinavia. Gender relations in welfare states*. Policy Press.
- Eurostat. (2020). *Activity rates by sex, age and citizenship*. [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-datasets/product?code=lfsa\\_argan](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-datasets/product?code=lfsa_argan)
- Eydal, G. B., Gíslason, I. V., Rostgaard, T., Brandth, B., Duvander, A.-Z., & Lammi-Taskula, J. (2015). Trends in parental leave in the Nordic countries: Has the forward march of gender equality halted? *Community, Work & Family*, 18(2), 167–181. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13668803.2014.1002754>
- Eydal, G. B., & Rostgaard, T. (2011). Gender Equality Revisited – Changes in Nordic Childcare Policies in the 2000s. *Social Policy & Administration*, 45(2), 161–179. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9515.2010.00762.x>
- Faber, S. T., & Priested Nielsen, H. (2016). *Remapping Gender, Place and Mobility: Global Confluences and Local Particularities in Nordic Peripheries*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315605180>
- Faber, S. T., & Priested Nielsen, H. (2015). Centering the Periphery. In S. T. Faber & Priested Nielsen H. (Eds.), *Remapping Gender, Place and Mobility* (pp. 3–18). Ashgate. <http://www.ashgate.com/isbn/9781472429698>
- Fagralón, K. (2018). *Miðnámsskúlin* [Personal communication].
- Farrugia, D. (2016). The mobility imperative for rural youth: The structural, symbolic and non-representational dimensions rural youth mobilities. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 19(6), 836–851. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2015.1112886>
- Føroya landsstýri. (2013). *Fólkaflýting og fólkaøkstur: Heildarætlan*. Føroya landsstýri.
- Forsberg, G. (1998). Regional variations in the gender contract: Gendered relations in labour markets, local politics and everyday life in Swedish regions. *Innovation: The European Journal of Social Science Research*, 11(2), 191–209. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13511610.1998.9968561>
- Forsberg, G. (2001). The difference that space makes. A way to describe the construction of local and regional gender contracts. *Norsk Geografisk Tidsskrift - Norwegian Journal of Geography*, 55(3), 161–165.
- Gaini, F. (2012). Child Centric Families and the Vulnerability of Small Scale Island Communities. *Anthropology News, April Edition*.
- Gaini, F. (2013). *Lessons of islands: Place and identity in the Faroe Islands*. Tórshavn: Faroe University Press.
- Gaini, F. (2017). 'Crack in the Ice'—Marginalization of Young Men in Contemporary Urban Greenland. In C. Haywood & T. Johansson (Eds.), *Marginalized Masculinities Contexts, Continuities and Change*. Routledge.
- Gaini, F., & Priested Nielsen, H. (2020). *Gender and island communities*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Gerrard, S. (2013). Mobilities, materialities, and masculinities: Interconnected mobility practices in Norwegian coastal fisheries. *Norsk Geografisk Tidsskrift*, 67(5), 312–319.
- Gerrard, S. (2017). *Mobility Practices and Gender Contracts: Changes in Gender*

Relations in Coastal Areas of Norway. *Nordic Journal on Law and Society*, 01(01–02).

Gíslason, I. V. (2012). Introduction. In Berit Brandth, A.-Z. Duvander, G. B. Eydal, I. V. Gíslason, J. Lammi-Taskula, & T. Rostgaard (Eds.), *Parental leave, childcare and gender equality in the Nordic countries*. Nordic Council of Ministers. TemaNord 2011: 562.

Greenland Statistics. (2019). *Greenland in figures 2019*. 2019. [http://www.stat.gl/publ/en/GF/2019/pdf/Greenland in Figures 2019.pdf](http://www.stat.gl/publ/en/GF/2019/pdf/Greenland%20in%20Figures%202019.pdf)

Gregory, A. (2016). Work-Life Balance. In S. Edgell, H. Gottfried, & E. Granter (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of the Sociology of Work and Employment*. SAGE Publications.

Grimsrud, G. M. (2011). Gendered spaces on trial: The influence of regional gender contracts on in-migration of women to rural Norway. *Geografiska Annaler: Series B, Human Geography*, 93(1), 3–20. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0467.2011.00358.x>

Grønlands Statistik. (2020). *Registrerede arbejdsøgende i lokaliteterne*.

Grønseth, A. S. (2011). Tamil Refugees in Pain: Challenging Solidarity in the Norwegian Welfare State. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 37(2), 315–332. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2010.521331>

Hamilton, L. C., & Otterstad, O. (1998). Sex Ratio and Community Size: Notes from the Northern Atlantic. *Population and Environment*, 20(1), 11–22. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1023347817418>

Hansen, A. M., & Tejsner, P. (2016). Identifying Challenges and Opportunities for Residents in Upernavik as Oil Companies are Making a First Entrance into Baffin Bay. *arc Arctic Anthropology*, 53(1), 84–94.

Hansen, S. J. (2014). *At komme fra 'udkanten': Om sted, stedsans og unges uddannelsesstrategier i et socialt rum under forandring: Belyst gennem et casestudie af Hirtshals, en havneby på den nordjyske vestkyst*. Det humanistisk Fakultet, Københavns Universitet.

Hanson, S. (2010). Gender and mobility: New approaches for informing sustainability. *Gender, Place & Culture*, 17(1), 5–23. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09663690903498225>

Hayfield, E. A. (2017). Exploring Transnational Realities in the Lives of Faroese Youngsters. *Nordic Journal of Migration Research*, 7(1), 3–11. <https://doi.org/10.1515/njmr-2017-0007>

Hayfield, E. A. (2018). Family-centred work motility in a small island society: The case of the Faroe Islands. *Gender, Place & Culture*, 25(8), 1138–1153. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0966369X.2018.1461075>

Hayfield, E. A., & Schug, M. (2019). 'It's Like They Have a Cognitive Map of Relations': Feeling Strange in a Small Island Community. *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 40(4), 383–398. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07256868.2019.1628719>

Hayfield, Olavson, & Patursson. (2016). *Part-time work in the Nordic region III: an introductory study of the Faroe Islands, Greenland and Åland Islands*. Copenhagen: Nordic Council of Ministers. TemaNord 2016: 518.

Hesse-Biber, S. (2010). Qualitative Approaches to Mixed Methods Practice. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 16(6), 455–468. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800410364611>

- Holm, D. (2007). *Demografisk lýsing av Suðuroy 2007*. Granskingardepilin fyri økismenning.
- Holm, D. (2020). *Dennis Holm, Mayor of Vági* [Written correspondence].
- Holm, D., & Mortensen, B. (2007). Vinnulívið í Suðuroynni í 2007. *Arbeidsrit*, 14. Granskingardepilin fyri økismenning. [https://www.setur.fo/media/5034/arbeidsrit\\_14-2007.pdf](https://www.setur.fo/media/5034/arbeidsrit_14-2007.pdf)
- Hovgaard, G. (2015). Being Away; Being at Home; Being Both The Case of Faroese Maritime Workers. In S. T. Faber & H. P. Nielsen (Eds.), *Remapping Gender, Place and Mobility—Global Confluences and Local Particularities in Nordic Peripheries*. Routledge.
- Ísfeld, R. P. (2019). *Marriage Migrants to the Faroe Islands: An Analysis of the Life-World of Non-Western Women Married to the Faroe Islands*. Aalborg Universitetsforlag. <https://vbn.aau.dk/en/publications/%C3%A6gteskabsmigranter-p%C3%A5-f%C3%A6r%C3%B8erne-en-analyse-af-oplevelser-og-erfari>
- Joensen, J.P. (1999). Ram rearing on the Faeroe Islands—Tradition, recreation and cultural dilemma. *Geografisk Tidsskrift*, 1. <https://tidsskrift.dk/geografisktidsskrift/article/view/42447>
- Joensen, J. P. (1985). *Folk og fisk: En studie over produktion og miljø i klipfiskeberedningen på Færøerne*. Aalborg Universitetsforlag.
- Jones, G. (1999). 'The Same People in the Same Places'? Socio-Spatial Identities and Migration in Youth. *Sociology*, 33(1), 1–22. <https://doi.org/10.1177/S0038038599000012>
- Jørgensen, J. K. (2018, September 27). Vedtager ulovligt budget: Læsø skruer op for armlægning med indenrigsministeren. *Danske Kommuner*. <http://www.danskekommuner.dk/Nyhedsarkiv/2018/September/27/Vedtager-ulovligt-budget-Laso-skruer-op-for-armlagningen-med-indenrigsministeren/>
- Júlíusdóttir, M., Skaptadóttir, U. D., & Karlsdóttir, A. (2013). Gendered migration in turbulent times in Iceland. *Norsk Geografisk Tidsskrift - Norwegian Journal of Geography*, 67(5), 266–275. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00291951.2013.847483>
- Jungk, R., & Müllert, N. R. (1989). *Håndbog i fremtidsværksteder: Vol. 2. udgave*. Politisk revy.
- Karides, M. (2017). Why Island Feminism? *Shima Shima: The International Journal of Research into Island Cultures*, 11(1).
- Kaufmann, V., Bergman, M. M., & Joye, D. (2004). Motility: Mobility as capital. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 28(4), 745–756. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0309-1317.2004.00549.x>
- Kocziszky, G., Nagy, Z., Rauhut, D., & Györfy, I. (2012). *Gender related out-migration tendencies in Northern Hungary and in Västernorrland, Sweden*. Delft: Regional Studies Association's Conference, 13th-16th May 2012.
- Kommune Kujalleq. (2019). Opdatering fra Erhvervsrådet. In *Kujalleq.gl*. [https://www.kujalleq.gl/Nyheder/2019/02/Opdatering-fra-Erhvervsraadet?sc\\_lang=da](https://www.kujalleq.gl/Nyheder/2019/02/Opdatering-fra-Erhvervsraadet?sc_lang=da)
- Kommune Kujalleq. (2020). *Lufthavn 2023*. Kommune Kujalleq. [https://www.kujalleq.gl:443/Nyheder/2020/01/Lufthavn-2023?sc\\_lang=da](https://www.kujalleq.gl:443/Nyheder/2020/01/Lufthavn-2023?sc_lang=da)



- Læsø Kommune. (2018). *Fakta om Læsø Kommune*. <https://www.laesoe.dk/kommunen/fakta-om-laesoe-kommune>
- Læsø Skole. (2020). *Læsø Skole*. <https://laesoeskole.aula.dk/>
- Læsøfærgen. (2020). *Læsøfærgen*. <https://www.laesoe-line.dk/>
- Little, J. (2002). Rural geography: Rural gender identity and the performance of masculinity and femininity in the countryside. *Progress in Human Geography*, 26(5), 665–670. <https://doi.org/10.1191/0309132502ph394pr>
- Little, J., & Panelli, R. (2003). Gender research in rural geography. *Gender, Place & Culture*, 10(3), 281–289. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0966369032000114046>
- Lohmann, N. (2005). Social Work Education for Rural Practice. In N. Lohmann & R. A. Lohmann (Eds.), *Rural Social Work Practice*. Columbia University Press.
- Massey, D. B. (1994). *Space, place and gender*. Polity Press; Blackwell Pub.
- McDowell, L. (1999). *Gender, identity and place: Understanding feminist geographies*. Polity Press.
- Meert, H. (2000). Rural Community Life and the Importance of Reciprocal Survival Strategies. *Sociologia Ruralis*, 40(3), 319–338. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9523.00151>
- Mentamálaráðið. (2018). *Næmingatalið í fólaskúlanum*. <https://www.ummr.fo/fo/arbeidsoki/utbugving-og-gransking/folkaskulin/naemingatalid-i-folkaskulanum/>
- Milbourne, P., & Kitchen, L. (2014). Rural mobilities: Connecting movement and fixity in rural places. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 34, 326–336. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2014.01.004>
- Mitchell, C. J. A., & Madden, M. (2014). Re-thinking commercial counterurbanisation: Evidence from rural Nova Scotia, Canada. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 36, 137–148. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2014.07.007>
- Municipalities of Suðuroy, D. (2018). *Suðuroyggin og framtíðin* (p. 42). <https://vagur.fo/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/2018-05-28-Upprit-til-landsst%C3%BDri%C3%B0-SU%C3%90UROYGGIN-OG-FRAMT%C3%8D%C3%90IN.pdf>
- Munkejord, M. C. (2006). Challenging Discourses on Rurality: Women and Men In-migrants' Constructions of the Good Life in a Rural Town in Northern Norway. *Sociologia Ruralis*, 46(3), 241–257. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9523.2006.00415.x>
- Naalakkersuisut. (2015). Øget anvendelse af grønlandske byggematerialer. In *Naalakkersuisut Nyheder*. [https://naalakkersuisut.gl/da/Naalakkersuisut/Nyheder/2015/08/170815\\_byggematerialer](https://naalakkersuisut.gl/da/Naalakkersuisut/Nyheder/2015/08/170815_byggematerialer)
- Nilsen, R. (2014). Rural modernisation as national development: The Norwegian case 1900–1950. *Norsk Geografisk Tidsskrift - Norwegian Journal of Geography*, 68(1), 50–58. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00291951.2013.870598>
- O'Reilly, K., Halvorson, S., Sultana, F., & Laurie, N. (2009). Introduction: Global perspectives on gender–water geographies. *Gender, Place & Culture*, 16(4), 381–385. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09663690903003868>
- Paulgaard, G. (2012). Geography of opportunity: Approaching adulthood at the margins of the northern European periphery. In U.-D. K. Bæck & G. Paulgaard (Eds.), *Rural futures? Finding one's place within changing labour markets*. Oksana Forlag.

- Pedersen, H. D., & Gram, M. (2018). 'The brainy ones are leaving': The subtlety of (un)cool places through the eyes of rural youth. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 21(5), 620–635. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2017.1406071>
- Priested Nielsen, H. (2016). Offshore but on track? Hypermobile and hyperflexible working lives. *Community, Work & Family Community, Work & Family*, 19(5), 538–553.
- Priested Nielsen, H. (2018). No place for their children: Negotiating gender, place and generation in a flexible work context. *gend place cult Gender, Place and Culture - A Journal of Feminist Geography*, 25(8), 1209–1224.
- Rasmussen, R., Roto, J., & Hamilton, L. (2015). *West-Nordic Region*. Nordic Council of Ministers.
- Rauhut, D., & Little, H. (2016). 'A one way ticket to the city, please!' on young women leaving the Swedish peripheral region Västernorrland. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 43, 301–310.
- Region Nordjylland. (2020a). *Bo og leve*. Region Nordjylland. <https://rn.dk/regional-udvikling/fakta-og-statistik/bo-og-leve>
- Region Nordjylland. (2020b). *Erhverv og beskæftigelse*. Region Nordjylland. <https://rn.dk/regional-udvikling/fakta-og-statistik/erhverv-og-beskaeftigelse>
- Region Nordjylland. (2020c). *Uddannelse og arbejde*. Region Nordjylland. <https://rn.dk/regional-udvikling/fakta-og-statistik/uddannelse-og-arbejde>
- Robertson, N., Perkins, H. C., & Taylor, N. (2008). Multiple Job Holding: Interpreting Economic, Labour Market and Social Change in Rural Communities. *Sociologia Ruralis*, 48(4), 331–350. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9523.2008.00470.x>
- Rönnlund, M. (2020). 'I Love this Place, but I Won't Stay': Identification with Place and Imagined Spatial Futures Among Youth Living in Rural Areas in Sweden. *Young*, 28(2), 123–137.
- Salmi, P. (2005). Rural Pluriactivity as a Coping Strategy in Small-Scale Fisheries. *Sociologia Ruralis*, 45(1-2), 22–36. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9523.2005.00288.x>
- Salmi, P. (2015). Constraints and Opportunities for Small-Scale Fishing Livelihoods in a Post-Productivist Coastal Setting. *Sociologia Ruralis*, 55(3), 258–274. <https://doi.org/10.1111/soru.12095>
- Schmidt, G. G. (2000). Remote, northern communities: Implications for social work practice. *International Social Work*, 43(3), 337–349. <https://doi.org/10.1177/002087280004300306>
- Schug, M. G. (2016). Factors in the Development of Spatial Cognition in Boys and Girls. *Boyhood Studies*, 9(2), 44–55. <https://doi.org/10.3167/bhs.2016.090204>
- Skyn. (2020). *Written correspondence based on yearly statistics, Petur Niclasen, director* [Personal communication].
- Standing, G. (2009). *Work after globalization: Building occupational citizenship*. Edward Elgar.
- Standing, G. (2011). *The precariat: The new dangerous class*. Bloomsbury Academic.
- Statistics Faroe Islands. (2019). *Statistics Faroe Islands*. <https://hagstova.fo/en>

Statistics Greenland. (2018). 2018 <http://www.stat.gl/dialog/main.asp?lang=da&sc=AR&version=201917>

Stockdale, A. (2006). Migration: Pre-requisite for rural economic regeneration? *Journal of Rural Studies*, 22(3), 354–366. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2005.11.001>

Stoklund, B., (1988). *Arbejde og kønsroller på Læsø o. 1200-1900*. Læsø Museum/Frederikshavn Bogtrykkeri.

van Voorst, R. (2009). 'I work all the time- he just waits for the animals to come back': Social impacts of climate changes: A Greenlandic case study. *Jàmbá. Journal of Disaster Risk Studies*, 2(3), 235–252.

Veirum, T. M. (2020). Estimat: Arbejdsuge på 35 timer vil koste 462 mio. Kr. *Sermitsiaq.Ag*.

Vries, W. M. D. (1993). Farming with other gainful activities in the Netherlands. *Sociologia Ruralis*, 33(2), 190–202. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9523.1993.tb00960.x>

Walsh, D. (2013). Reproducing Gendered Rural Relations?: Tensions and Reconciliations in Young Women's Narratives of Leaving and Returning in Newfoundland, Canada. In G. T. Bonifacio (Ed.), *Gender and Rural Migration—Realities, Conflict and Change* (pp. 60–78). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203584606-12>

Walsh, D. (2012). Using mobility to gain stability: Rural household strategies and outcomes in long-distance labour mobility. *Journal of Rural and Community Dev*, 7(3). 123-143.

Wara, T., & Munkejord, M. C. (2018). (Re)creating gender hierarchies within northern landscapes: A study of stories about nature and gender. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 27(4), 481–491.

# About this publication

## Equality in Isolated Labour Markets

Equal opportunities for men and women in geographically isolated labour markets in Læsø (DK), Suðuroy (FO), and Narsaq (GL)

*Helene Pristed Nielsen, Erika Anne Hayfield, Steven Arnfjord*

ISBN 978-92-893-6665-6 (PDF)

ISBN 978-92-893-6666-3 (ONLINE)

<http://dx.doi.org/10.6027/temanord2020-522>

TemaNord 2020:522

ISSN 0908-6692

© Nordic Council of Ministers 2020

### Disclaimer

This publication was funded by the Nordic Council of Ministers. However, the content does not necessarily reflect the Nordic Council of Ministers' views, opinions, attitudes or recommendations.

### Rights and permissions

This work is made available under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International license (CC BY 4.0) <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>.

**Translations:** If you translate this work, please include the following disclaimer: This translation was not produced by the Nordic Council of Ministers and should not be construed as official. The Nordic Council of Ministers cannot be held responsible for the translation or any errors in it.

**Adaptations:** If you adapt this work, please include the following disclaimer along with the attribution: This is an adaptation of an original work by the Nordic Council of Ministers. Responsibility for the views and opinions expressed in the adaptation rests solely with its author(s). The views and opinions in this adaptation have not been approved by the Nordic Council of Ministers.

**Third-party content:** The Nordic Council of Ministers does not necessarily own every single part of this work. The Nordic Council of Ministers cannot, therefore, guarantee that the reuse of third-party content does not in-fringe the copyright of the third party. If you wish to reuse any third-party content, you bear the risks associated with any such rights violations. You are responsible for determining whether there is a need to obtain permission for the use of third-party content, and if so, for obtaining the relevant permission from the copyright holder. Examples of third-party content may include, but are not limited to, tables, figures or images.

### Photo rights (further permission required for reuse):

Any queries regarding rights and licences should be addressed to:  
Nordic Council of Ministers/Publication Unit  
Ved Stranden 18

DK-1061 Copenhagen  
Denmark  
pub@norden.org

### **Nordic co-operation**

*Nordic co-operation* is one of the world's most extensive forms of regional collaboration, involving Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, and the Faroe Islands, Greenland and Åland.

*Nordic co-operation* has firm traditions in politics, economics and culture and plays an important role in European and international forums. The Nordic community strives for a strong Nordic Region in a strong Europe.

*Nordic co-operation* promotes regional interests and values in a global world. The values shared by the Nordic countries help make the region one of the most innovative and competitive in the world.

The Nordic Council of Ministers  
Nordens Hus  
Ved Stranden 18  
DK-1061 Copenhagen  
pub@norden.org

Read more Nordic publications on [www.norden.org/publications](http://www.norden.org/publications)